



CHARTING THE PATH
**TOWARD
THE FUTURE**
Geotechnical Engineering **Education**



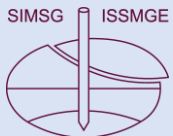
NANCY, FRANCE
JULY 2-4 2025

Teaching numerical methods or teaching with numerical methods?

Francesca Ceccato

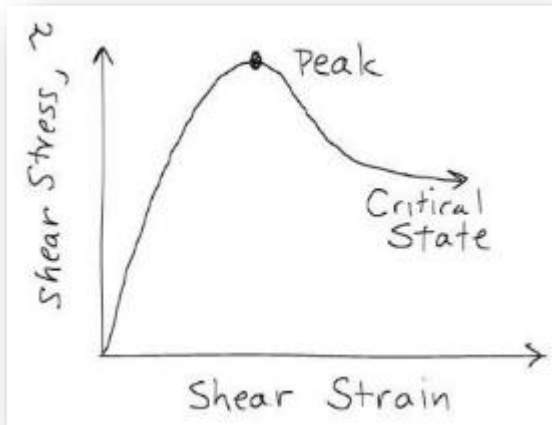


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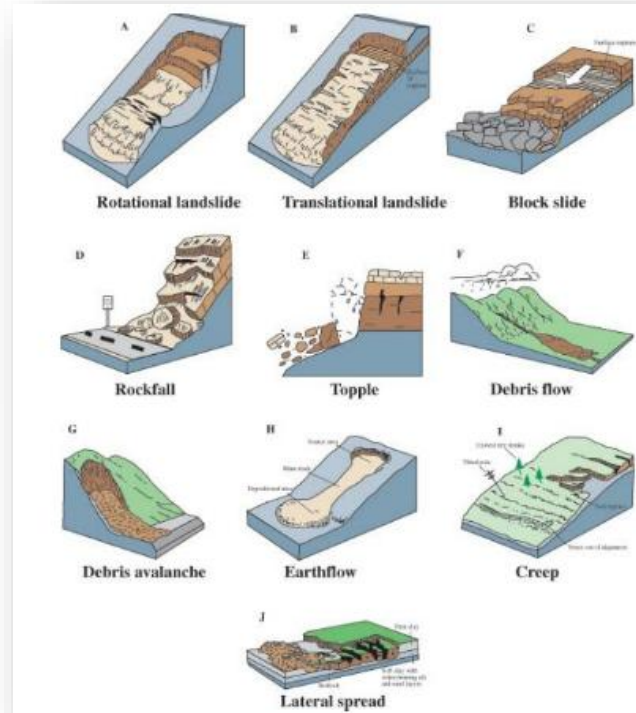


Introduction

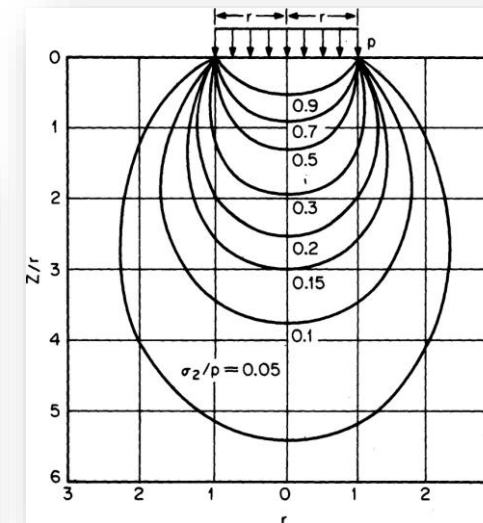
Figures, charts, and videos are fundamental in geotechnical engineering education.



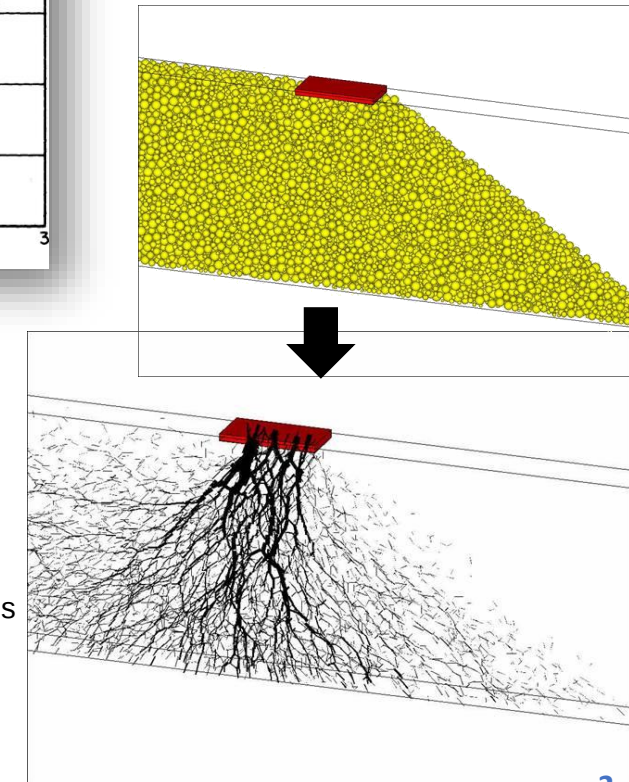
A narrative line graph (Bruce Kutter 2010)



A hybrid, classificational-analytic-narrative set of block diagrams (USGS 2004)



Analytic line graph

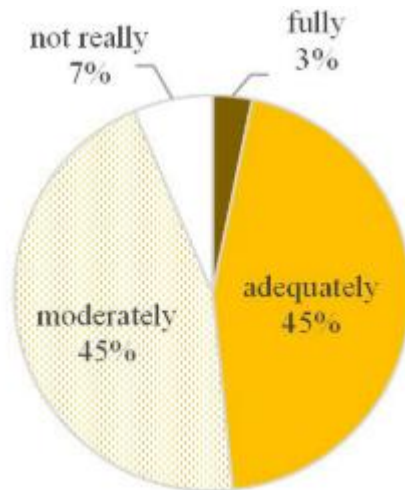


Symbolic 3D diagrams (Gabrieli 2014)

Introduction

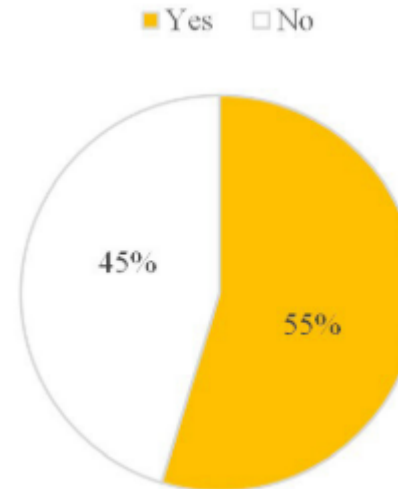
Need for **high-quality** educational materials!

Are you satisfied with the educational material you currently use in your teaching?



52% not satisfied with the materials they currently used!

Were you satisfied with any material found (after searching)?



“This finding contradicts the –largely unexamined– popular belief that there is no scarcity of quality educational material at the university level”

Pantazidou, Marina, and Michele Calvello. 2023. “What Kinds of Educational Material Are Useful for and Desired by University Instructors? The Case of Geotechnical Engineering.” *Soils and Rocks* 47 (2): e2024003623. <https://doi.org/10.28927/sr.2024.003623>.

Collaboration between TC103 and TC306

TC306
Geoengineering education

TC103
Numerical methods



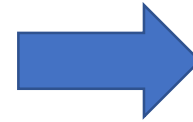
Objective: Develop peer-reviewed, high-quality, sharable educational materials using numerical methods

Fundamental Question

**Can we use numerical
methods in education
without teaching the
underlying
mathematical details?**

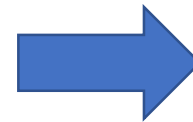
Internal survey on ready-to-use material

- Some people have material, but not ready to be shared



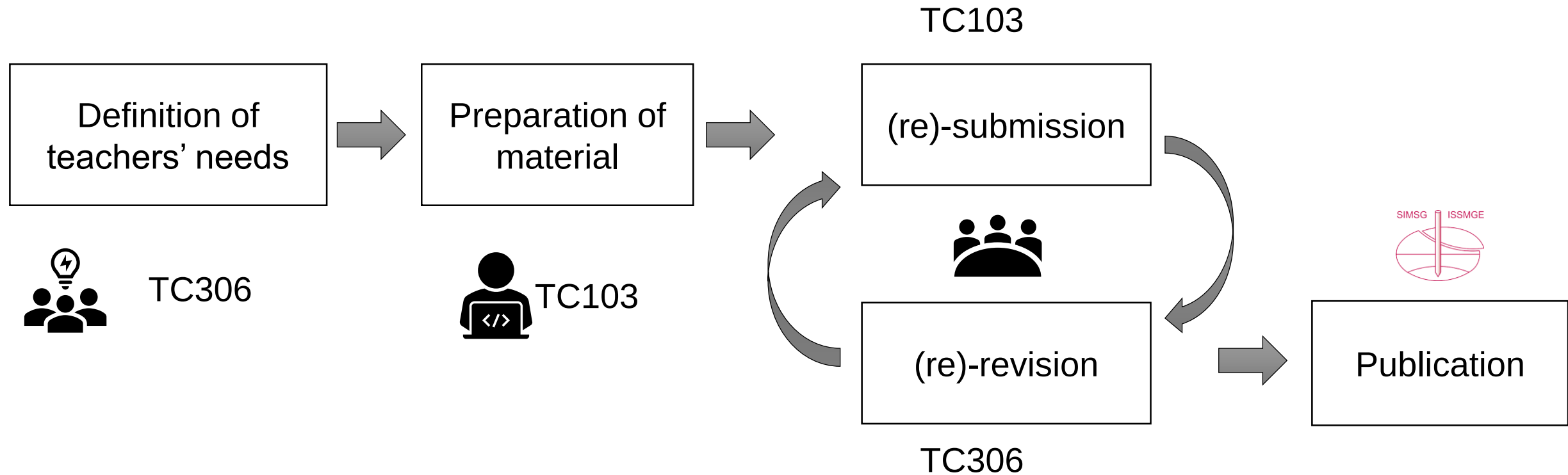
- The «solitude of teaching».
- Necessity to create and engaged community!

- Most of the material (from TC103) is for advanced courses



- Necessity to create material useful for both basic and advanced courses

Methodology



Defining Teachers' Needs

1. Identify the specific topic or concept
"Stress distribution under loaded areas"
2. Explain the current challenge or gap
"Students need to be convinced that the theory of elasticity, despite its simplifying assumptions, can provide reasonably accurate results"
3. Desired learning outcome
"Visualize and compare the stress distributions calculated using the theory of elasticity with those obtained using more advanced models suitable for soil behaviour"
4. Context or examples
5. Potential formats or approaches

Stress distributions underneath loaded areas

"Convince my students and myself that the theory of elasticity performs well: I would like to see how the results would differ if the stress distribution was calculated with something more suitable for soil than the theory of elasticity. I want to see with my own eyes and show students that the difference is indeed small. Also, I would like to provide examples of when the differences are not negligible." (M. Pantazidou 2024)

Preparing Educational Material

- **Product:** figure(s), video(s), Excel sheets, models, ppt slides...
- **Metadata:** should guide the use of the material

- Title,
- Soil mechanics issue/concept,
- Course chapter/topic,
- Material type,
- Brief articulation of main idea,
- Name and contact of the author,
- **Additional material** (including detailed explanation of figures and suggestions for instructors)
- License of use.

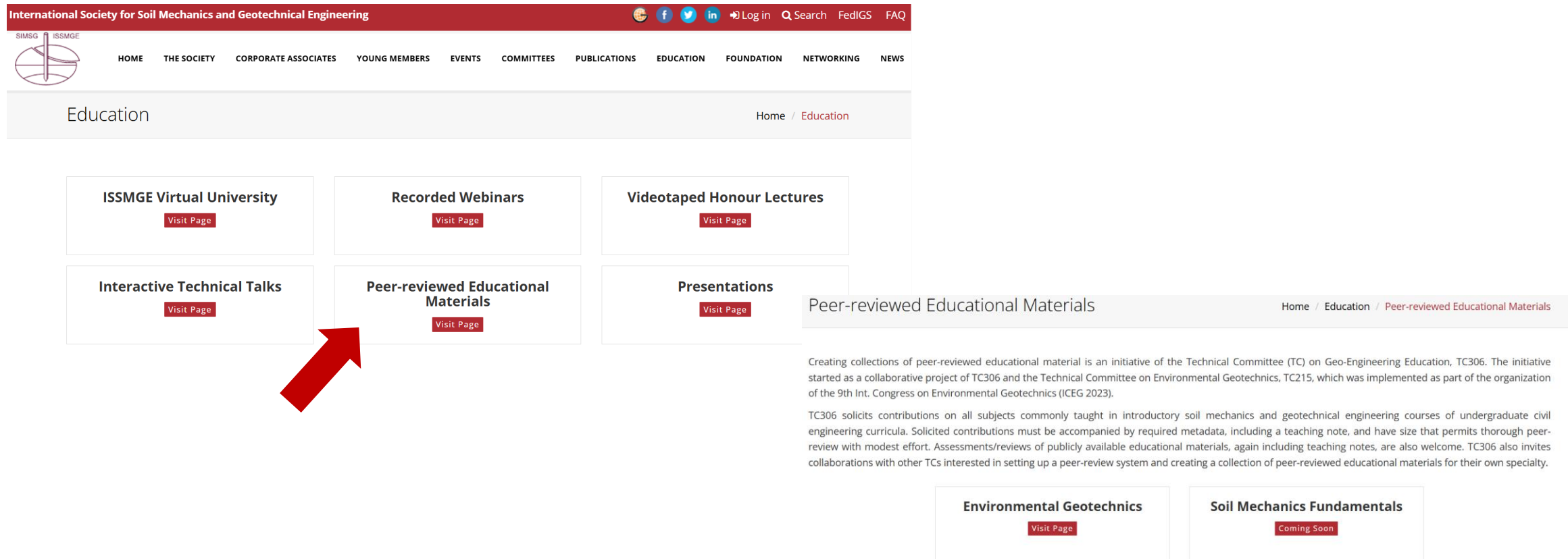


Metadata

- Title,
- Soil mechanics issue/concept,
- Course chapter/topic,
- Material type,
- Name and contact of the author,
- License of use,
- *Educational challenge or gap addressed*
- *Learning outcome*
- *Suggestion for basic and advanced courses*
- Additional material

Review and Publication

- Peer-review process
- Publication on ISSMGE website (<https://www.issmge.org/education/peer-reviewed-educational-materials>)



The screenshot displays the ISSMGE website's Education page. The header includes the ISSMGE logo and navigation links. The main content area features several boxes for educational resources: ISSMGE Virtual University, Recorded Webinars, Videotaped Honour Lectures, Interactive Technical Talks, Peer-reviewed Educational Materials (highlighted with a red arrow), and Presentations. A sidebar on the right provides a breadcrumb trail and a detailed description of the peer-reviewed educational materials initiative, along with links to Environmental Geotechnics and Soil Mechanics Fundamentals.

International Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering

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Education Home / Education

ISSMGE Virtual University Visit Page

Recorded Webinars Visit Page

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Interactive Technical Talks Visit Page

Peer-reviewed Educational Materials Visit Page

Presentations Visit Page

Peer-reviewed Educational Materials Home / Education / Peer-reviewed Educational Materials

Creating collections of peer-reviewed educational material is an initiative of the Technical Committee (TC) on Geo-Engineering Education, TC306. The initiative started as a collaborative project of TC306 and the Technical Committee on Environmental Geotechnics, TC215, which was implemented as part of the organization of the 9th Int. Congress on Environmental Geotechnics (ICEG 2023).

TC306 solicits contributions on all subjects commonly taught in introductory soil mechanics and geotechnical engineering courses of undergraduate civil engineering curricula. Solicited contributions must be accompanied by required metadata, including a teaching note, and have size that permits thorough peer-review with modest effort. Assessments/reviews of publicly available educational materials, again including teaching notes, are also welcome. TC306 also invites collaborations with other TCs interested in setting up a peer-review system and creating a collection of peer-reviewed educational materials for their own specialty.

Environmental Geotechnics Visit Page

Soil Mechanics Fundamentals Coming Soon

Results: products

<https://researchdata.cab.unipd.it/id/eprint/1549>

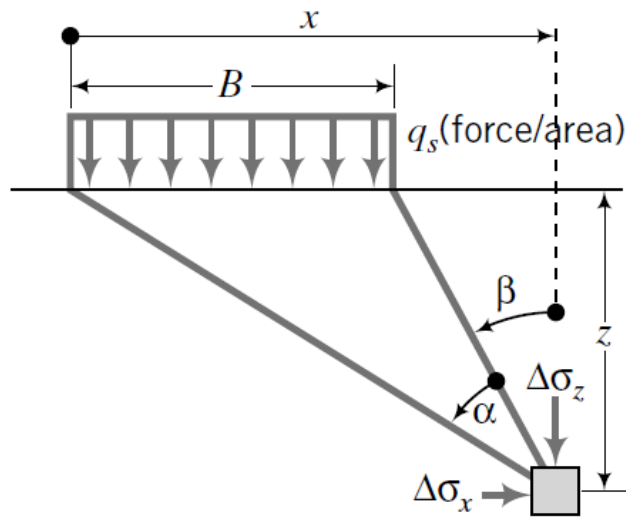
Shared educational material

- **Contour figures** of normalized stress increments ($\Delta\sigma_z/q$, $\Delta\sigma_x/q$, $\Delta\tau_{zx}/q$) with normalized coordinates (X/B, Z/B) (.fig and .jpg format) obtained with analytical solution.
- **Excel sheets** with normalized stress increments ($\Delta\sigma_z/q$, $\Delta\sigma_x/q$, $\Delta\tau_{zx}/q$) with normalized coordinates (X/B, Z/B).
- **Contour figures** of vertical stresses and displacement obtained with **FEM** using different material parameters and constitutive models.
- **PowerPoint slides** with the analytical and numerical solutions.
- **FEM models** (GeoStudio).

Analytical solution

Contour figures and Excel file are obtained implementing the analytical solution in Matlab.

Stress under a strip load



$$\Delta\sigma_z = \frac{q}{\pi} [\alpha + \sin \alpha \cos(\alpha + 2\beta)]$$

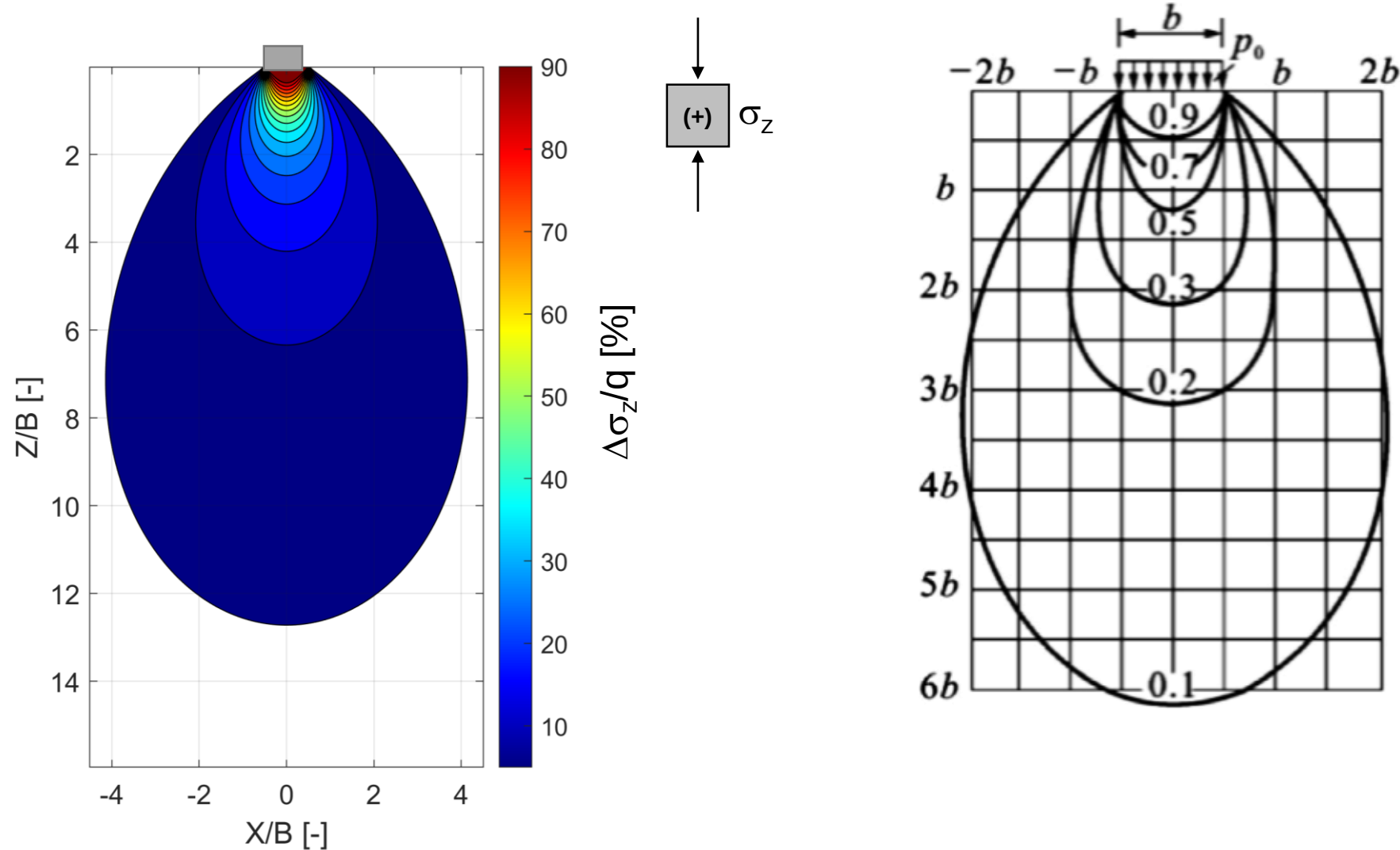
$$\Delta\sigma_x = \frac{q}{\pi} [\alpha - \sin \alpha \cos(\alpha + 2\beta)]$$

$$\Delta\tau_{zx} = \frac{q}{\pi} [\sin \alpha \cos(\alpha + 2\beta)]$$

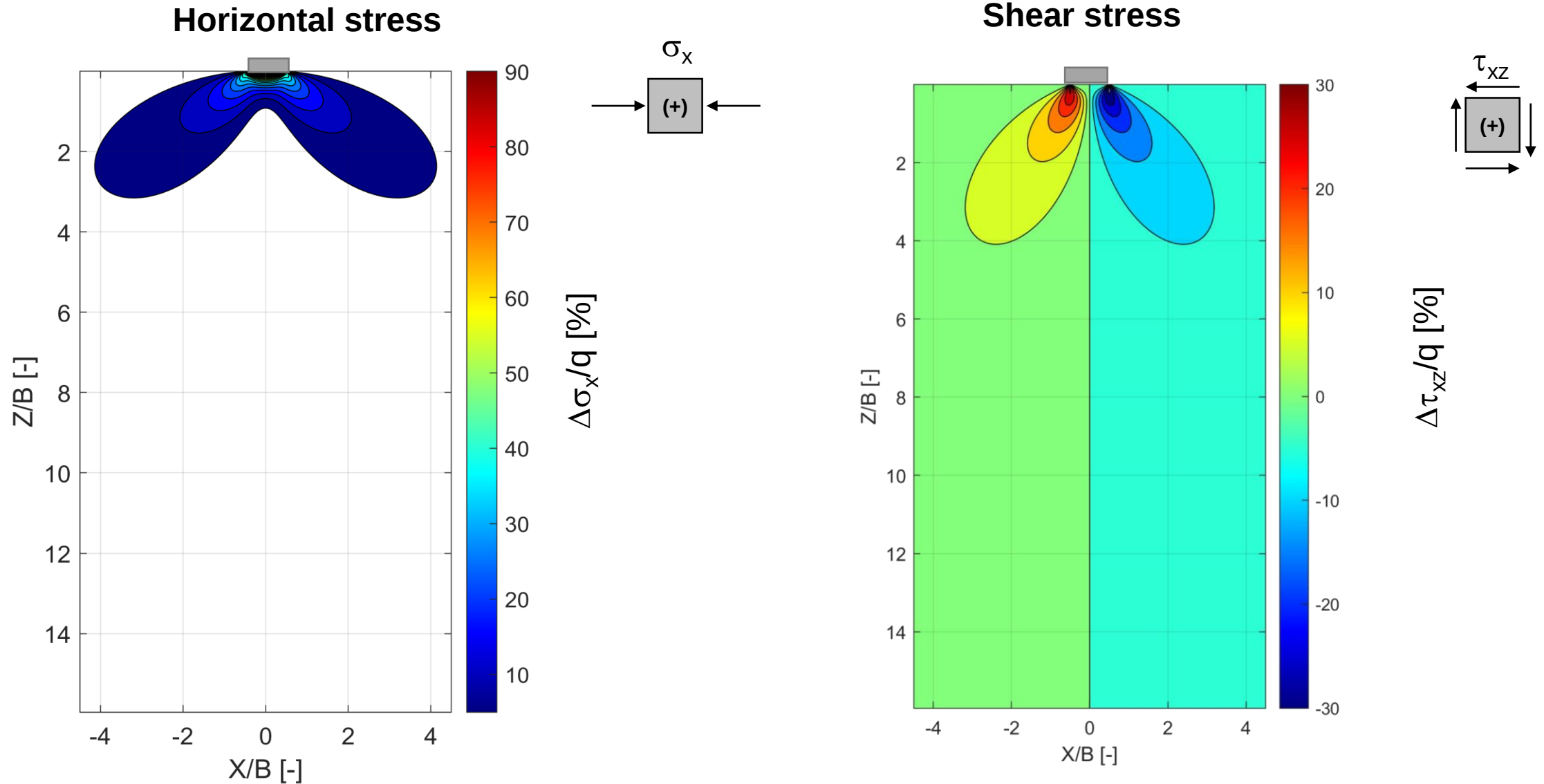


Hypothesis: homogeneous elastic halfspace

Contour figures: vertical stress increment



Contour figures: horizontal and shear stress increment



Excel sheets (analytical solution)

Teachers can use it to create additional figures for their classes or provide assignments to students.

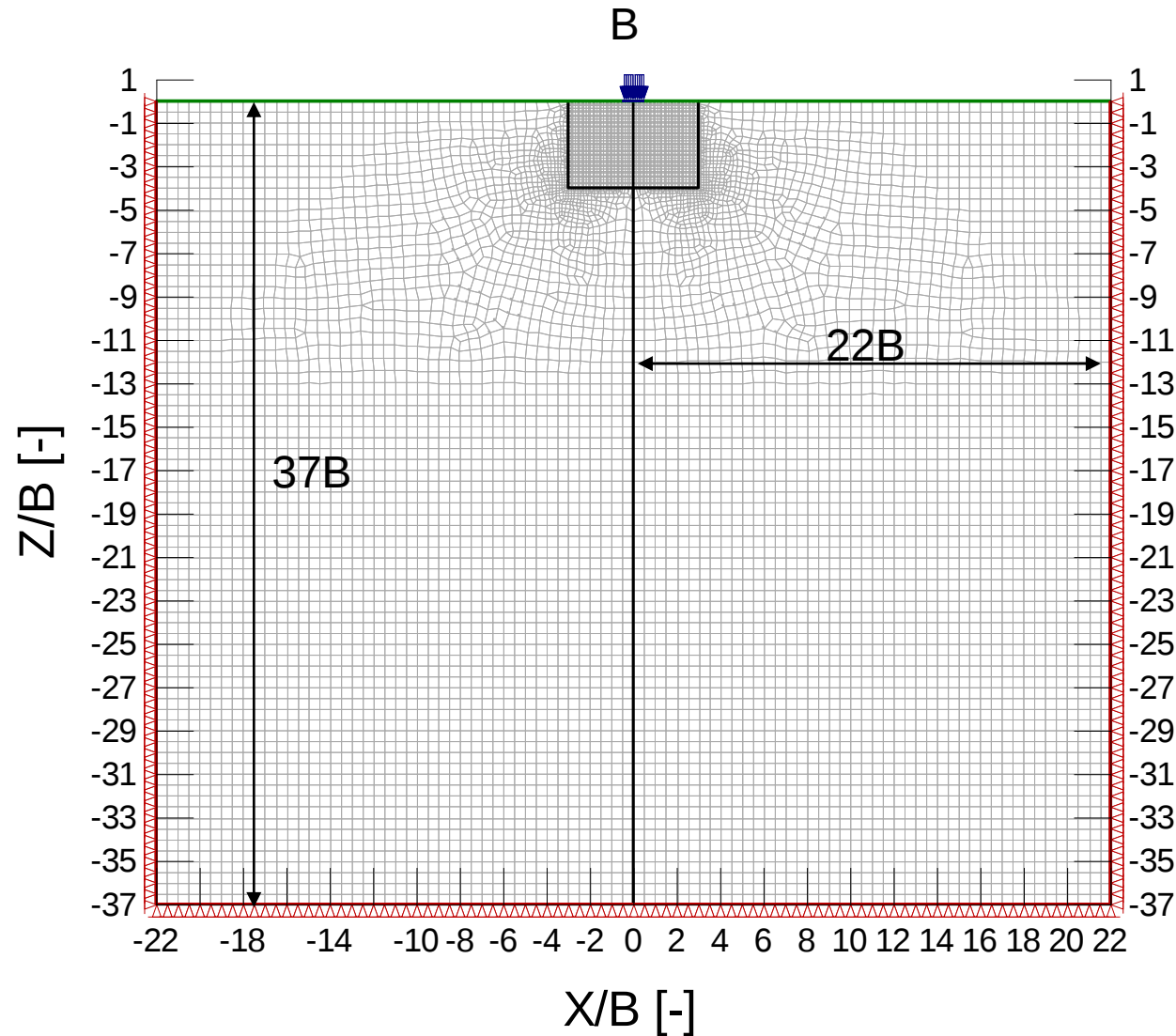
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X									
1					Horizontal coordinated with 0 at the center of loaded area																												
2			x [m]		-9	-8.9	-8.8	-8.7	-8.6	-8.5	-8.4	-8.3	-8.2	-8.1	-8	-7.9	-7.8	-7.7	-7.6	-7.5	-7.4	-7.3	-7.2	-7.1									
3			X/B		-4.5	-4.45	-4.4	-4.35	-4.3	-4.25	-4.2	-4.15	-4.1	-4.05	-4	-3.95	-3.9	-3.85	-3.8	-3.75	-3.7	-3.65	-3.6	-3.5									
4	Vertical coordiante with zero at surface	z [m]	Z/B		Values of normalized vertical stress increment ($\Delta\sigma_z/q$) at corresponding coordinates																												
5		0.01	0.005		2.02E-10	2.12E-10	2.22E-10	2.32E-10	2.44E-10	2.56E-10	2.68E-10	2.82E-10	2.96E-10	3.11E-10	3.28E-10	3.45E-10	3.63E-10	3.83E-10	4.04E-10	4.27E-10	4.51E-10	4.78E-10	5.06E-10	5.36E-10									
6		0.11	0.055		2.69E-07	2.82E-07	2.95E-07	3.09E-07	3.24E-07	3.40E-07	3.57E-07	3.75E-07	3.94E-07	4.14E-07	4.36E-07	4.59E-07	4.84E-07	5.10E-07	5.38E-07	5.68E-07	6.01E-07	6.35E-07	6.73E-07	7.13E-07									
7		0.21	0.105		1.87E-06	1.96E-06	2.05E-06	2.15E-06	2.25E-06	2.36E-06	2.48E-06	2.61E-06	2.74E-06	2.88E-06	3.03E-06	3.19E-06	3.36E-06	3.54E-06	3.74E-06	3.95E-06	4.17E-06	4.41E-06	4.67E-06	4.95E-06									
8		0.31	0.155		6.01E-06	6.29E-06	6.59E-06	6.90E-06	7.24E-06	7.59E-06	7.97E-06	8.37E-06	8.79E-06	9.25E-06	9.73E-06	1.02E-05	1.08E-05	1.14E-05	1.20E-05	1.27E-05	1.34E-05	1.42E-05	1.50E-05	1.59E-05									
9		0.41	0.205		1.39E-05	1.45E-05	1.52E-05	1.59E-05	1.67E-05	1.75E-05	1.84E-05	1.93E-05	2.03E-05	2.13E-05	2.25E-05	2.36E-05	2.49E-05	2.63E-05	2.77E-05	2.93E-05	3.09E-05	3.27E-05	3.46E-05	3.67E-05									
10		0.51	0.255		2.67E-05	2.79E-05	2.92E-05	3.06E-05	3.21E-05	3.36E-05	3.53E-05	3.71E-05	3.89E-05	4.10E-05	4.31E-05	4.54E-05	4.78E-05	5.04E-05	5.31E-05	5.61E-05	5.93E-05	6.27E-05	6.63E-05	7.03E-05									
11		0.61	0.305		4.55E-05	4.76E-05	4.98E-05	5.22E-05	5.47E-05	5.74E-05	6.02E-05	6.32E-05	6.64E-05	6.98E-05	7.34E-05	7.73E-05	8.14E-05	8.59E-05	9.06E-05	9.56E-05	0.000101	0.000107	0.000113	0.000119									
12		0.71	0.355		7.15E-05	7.48E-05	7.83E-05	8.20E-05	8.59E-05	9.01E-05	9.46E-05	9.93E-05	0.000104	0.00011	0.000115	0.000121	0.000128	0.000135	0.000142	0.00015	0.000158	0.000168	0.000177	0.000186									
13		0.81	0.405		0.000106	0.000111	0.000116	0.000121	0.000127	0.000133	0.00014	0.000147	0.000154	0.000162	0.00017	0.000179	0.000189	0.000199	0.00021	0.000221	0.000234	0.000247	0.000262	0.000277									
14		0.91	0.455		0.000149	0.000156	0.000163	0.000171	0.000179	0.000188	0.000197	0.000207	0.000217	0.000228	0.00024	0.000253	0.000266	0.00028	0.000296	0.000312	0.000329	0.000348	0.000368	0.000389									
15		1.01	0.505		0.000203	0.000212	0.000222	0.000233	0.000244	0.000256	0.000268	0.000281	0.000295	0.00031	0.000326	0.000343	0.000362	0.000381	0.000402	0.000424	0.000447	0.000472	0.0005	0.000527									
16		1.11	0.555		0.000268	0.00028	0.000293	0.000307	0.000322	0.000337	0.000354	0.000371	0.00039	0.000409	0.00043	0.000453	0.000476	0.000502	0.000529	0.000558	0.000589	0.000622	0.000657	0.000693									
17		1.21	0.605		0.000345	0.000361	0.000378	0.000395	0.000414	0.000434	0.000455	0.000477	0.000501	0.000526	0.000553	0.000582	0.000612	0.000645	0.000679	0.000716	0.000756	0.000798	0.000844	0.000893									
18		1.31	0.655		0.000435	0.000455	0.000476	0.000498	0.000522	0.000547	0.000573	0.000601	0.000631	0.000663	0.000696	0.000732	0.00077	0.000811	0.000854	0.000901	0.00095	0.001003	0.00106	0.00111									
19		1.41	0.705		0.000539	0.000563	0.000589	0.000617	0.000646	0.000677	0.000709	0.000744	0.00078	0.000819	0.000861	0.000905	0.000952	0.001002	0.001055	0.001112	0.001173	0.001238	0.001307	0.001377									
20		1.51	0.755		0.000657	0.000687	0.000718	0.000752	0.000787	0.000824	0.000864	0.000906	0.00095	0.000997	0.001047	0.001101	0.001158	0.001218	0.001283	0.001351	0.001425	0.001503	0.001587	0.00167									
21		1.61	0.805		0.00079	0.000826	0.000864	0.000903	0.000946	0.00099	0.001037	0.001088	0.001141	0.001197	0.001257	0.001321	0.001389	0.001461	0.001538	0.00162	0.001707	0.001801	0.001901	0.002007									
22		1.71	0.855		0.000939	0.000981	0.001026	0.001073	0.001123	0.001175	0.001231	0.00129	0.001353	0.00142	0.001491	0.001566	0.001646	0.001731	0.001821	0.001918	0.002021	0.002131	0.002248	0.00237									
23		1.81	0.905		0.001104	0.001153	0.001205	0.001261	0.001319	0.00138	0.001446	0.001515	0.001588	0.001666	0.001748	0.001836	0.001929	0.002028	0.002133	0.002246	0.002366	0.002493	0.00263	0.00277									
24	1.91	0.955		0.001285	0.001343	0.001403	0.001467	0.001534	0.001605	0.001681	0.001761	0.001845	0.001935	0.002031	0.002132	0.002239	0.002353	0.002475	0.002604	0.002742	0.002889	0.003046	0.00321										
			Dimensions and load		DeltaSigmaZ	DeltaSigmaX	DeltaTau	DeltaSigmaZ_norm	DeltaSigmaX_norm	DeltaTa	...																						



Numerical solution

Feature	Model 1 (Analytical Comparison)	Model 2 (Elastic - Medium Dense Sand)	Model 3 (Elastic - Soft Clay)	Model 4 (Mohr-Coulomb - Medium Dense Sand)	Model 5 (Modified Cam Clay)	Model 6 (Modified Cam Clay - Excavation)
Load Entity	100kPa					
Load Width	1m					
Material Model	Linear Elastic					
Material parameters	E=30000kPa, v=0.3					
Soil Unit Weight	0					
Notes	No gravity, used for comparison with analytical solution					

Model 1: geometry and boundary conditions

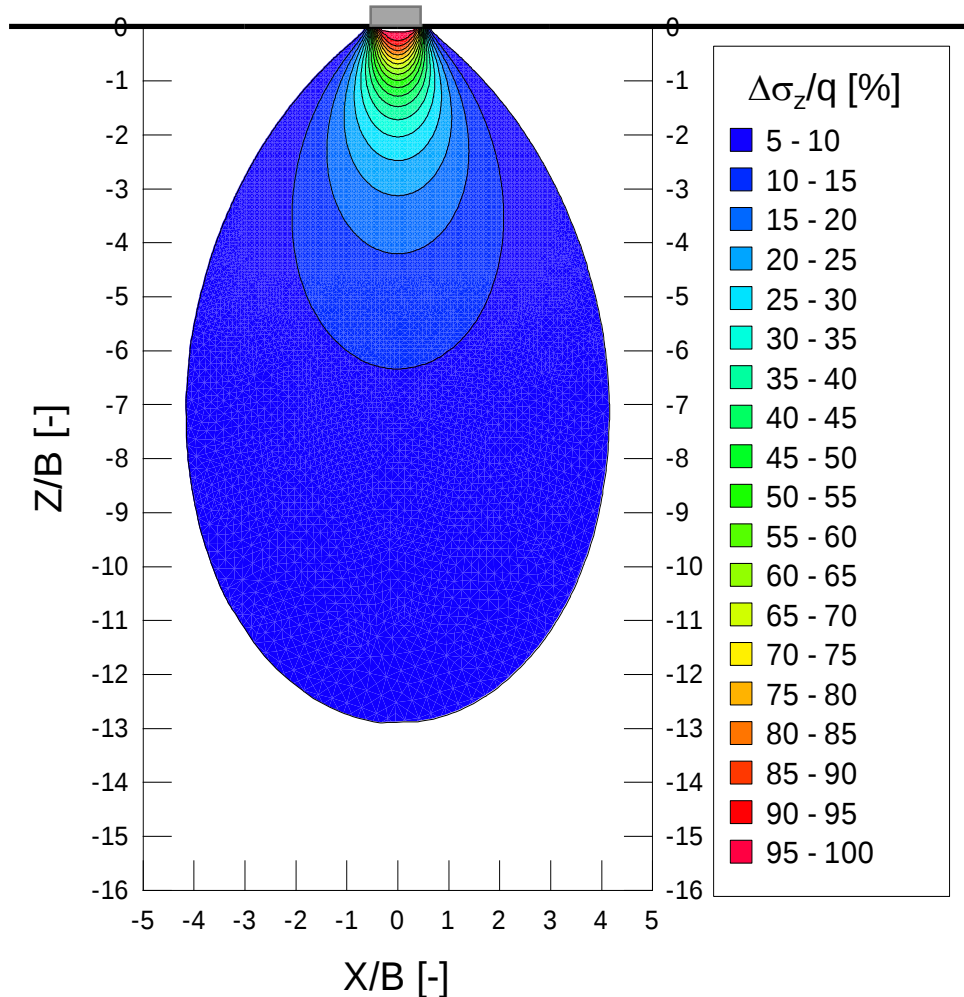


*Will you show it to
your students?*

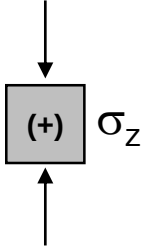
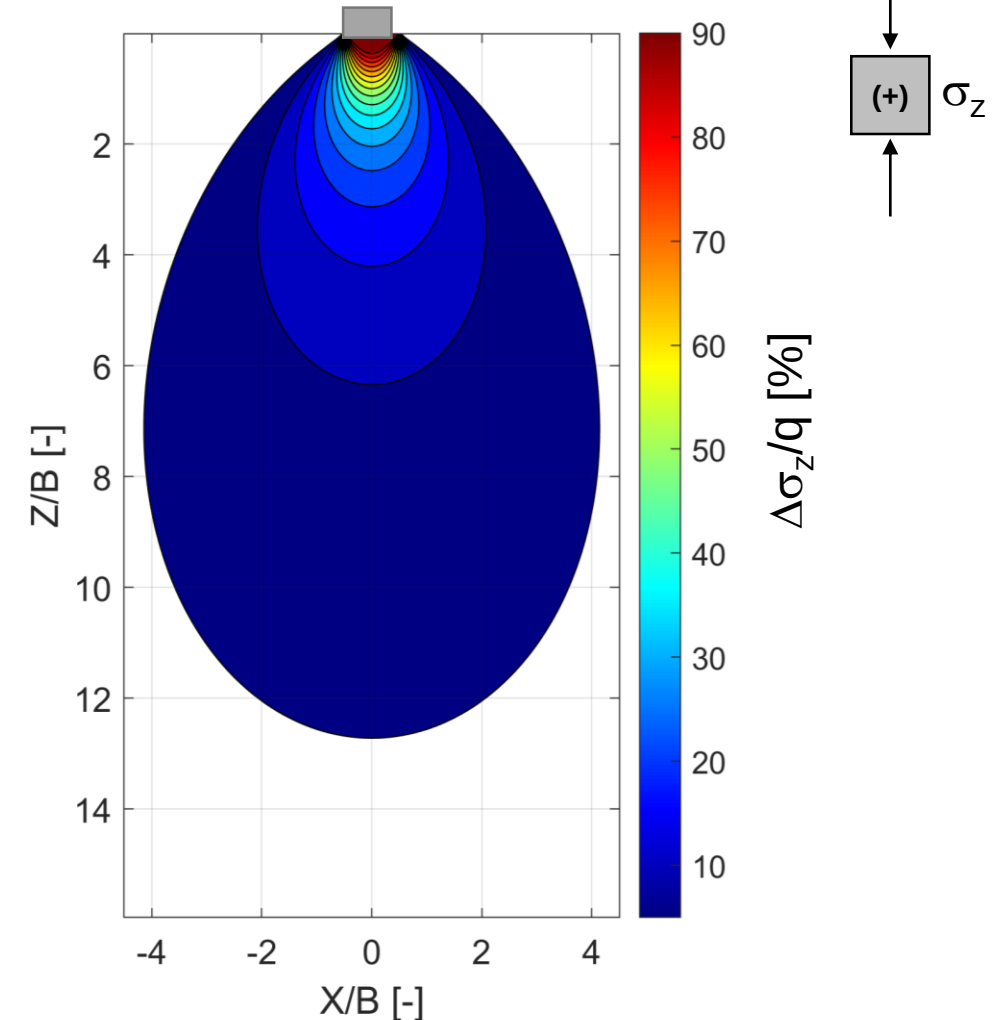


Increment of vertical stress due to a uniform, flexible strip load

Finite Element method

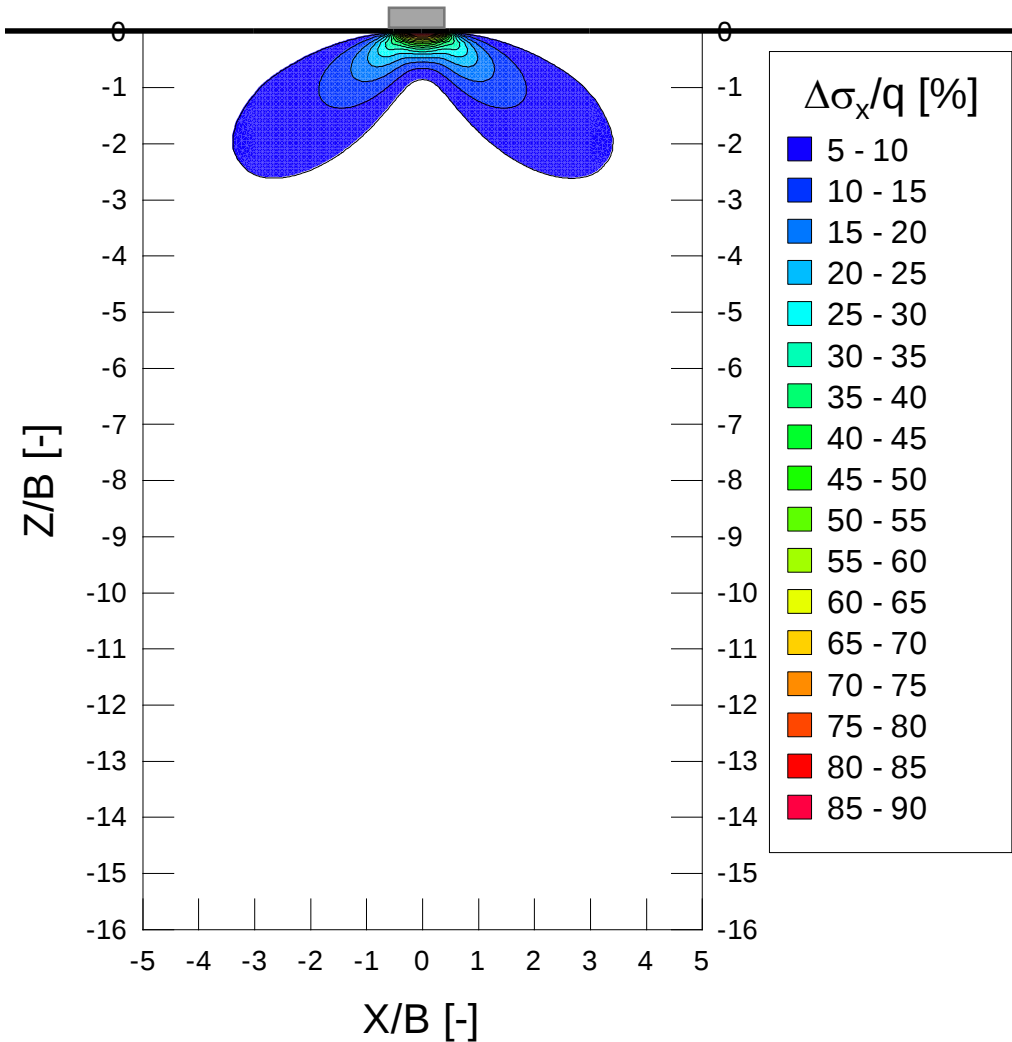


Analytical method

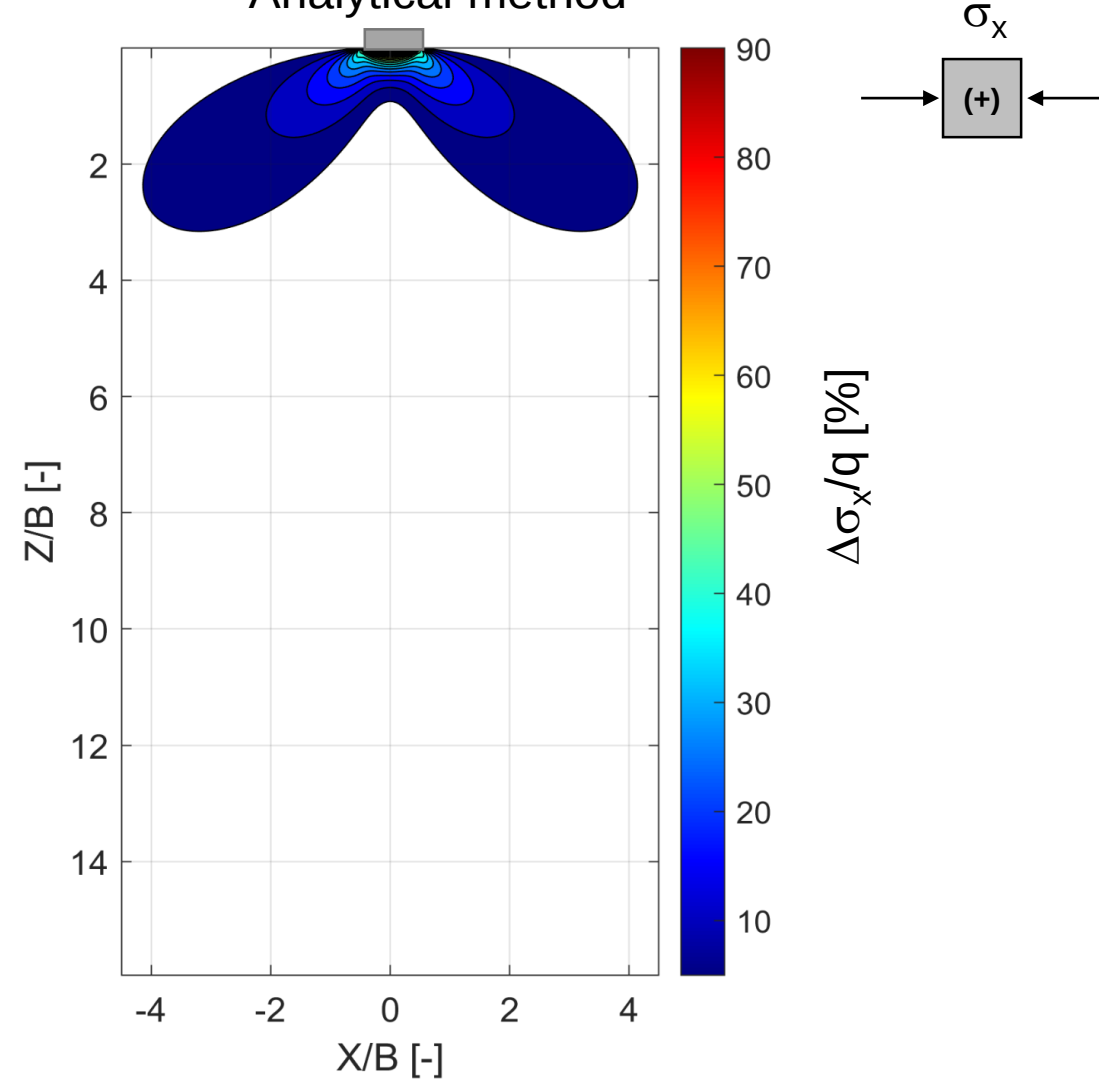


Increment of horizontal stress due to a uniform strip load

Finite Element method

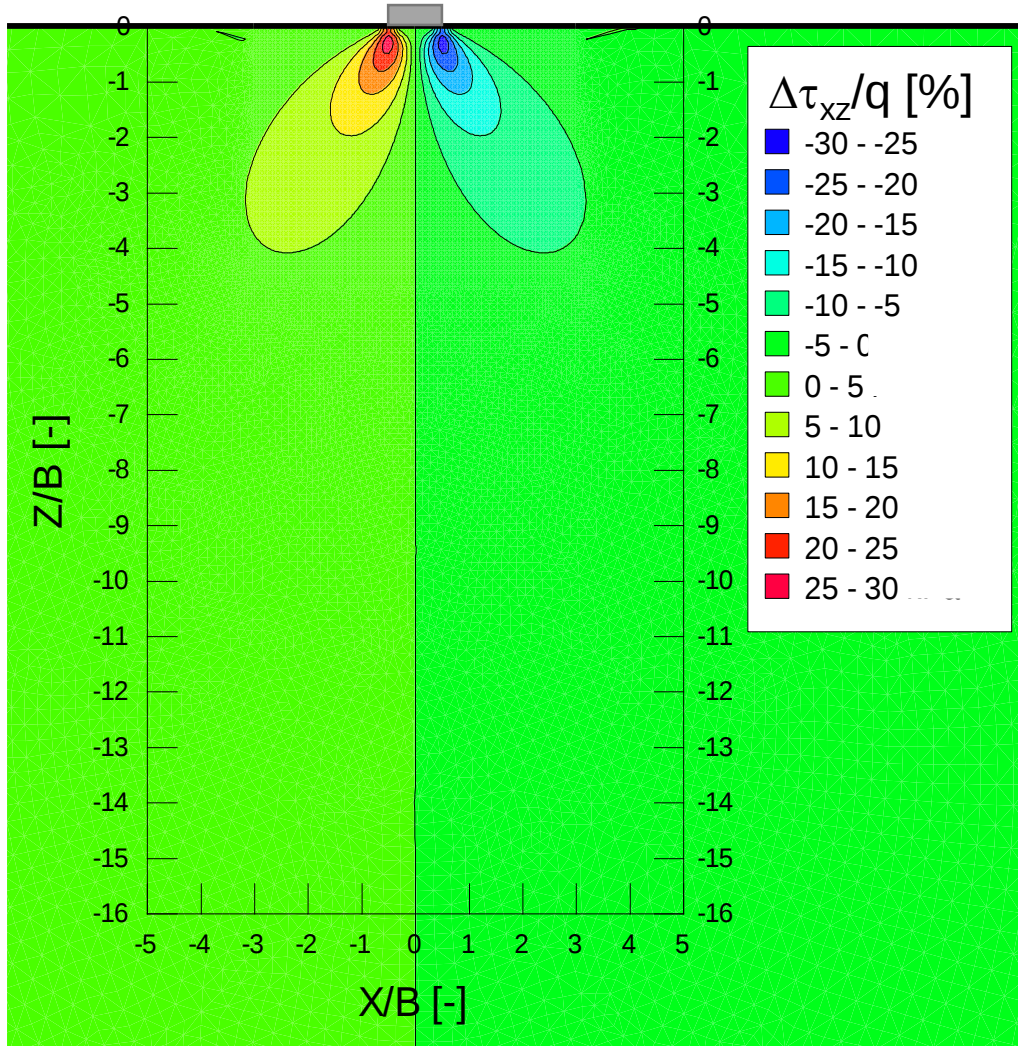


Analytical method

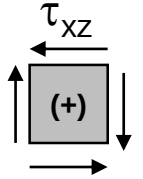
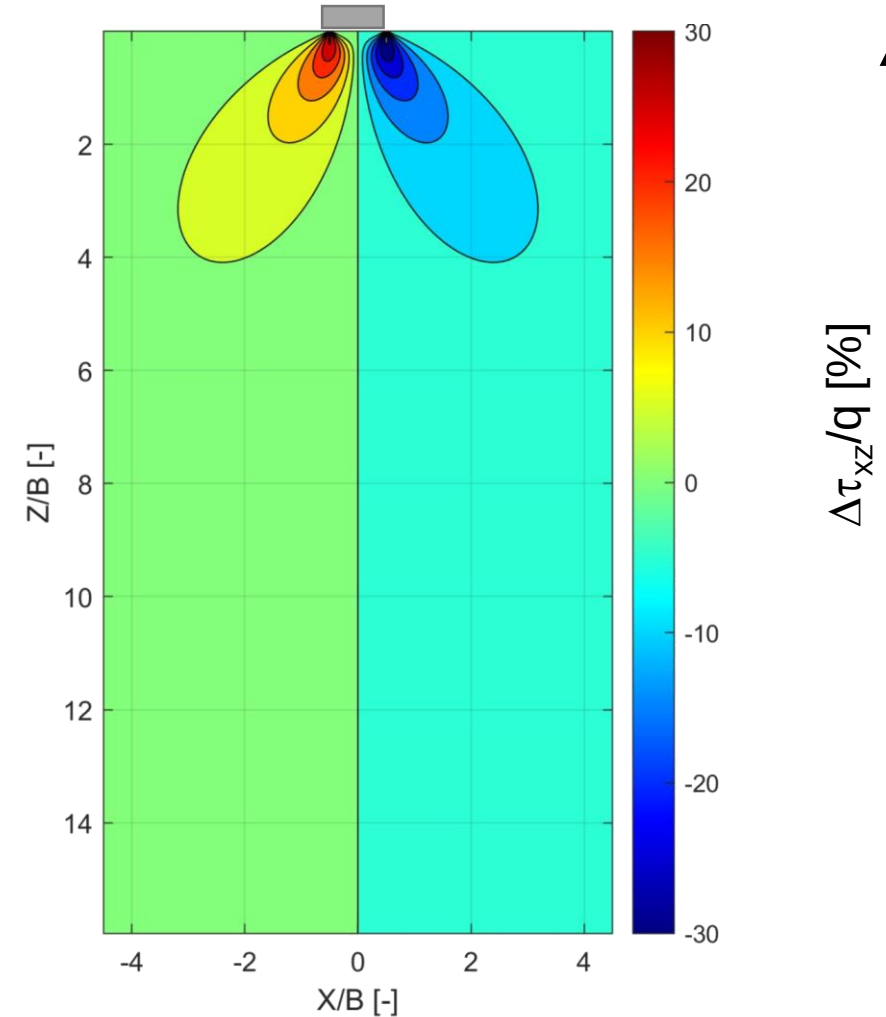


Increment of shear stress due to a uniform strip load

Finite Element method

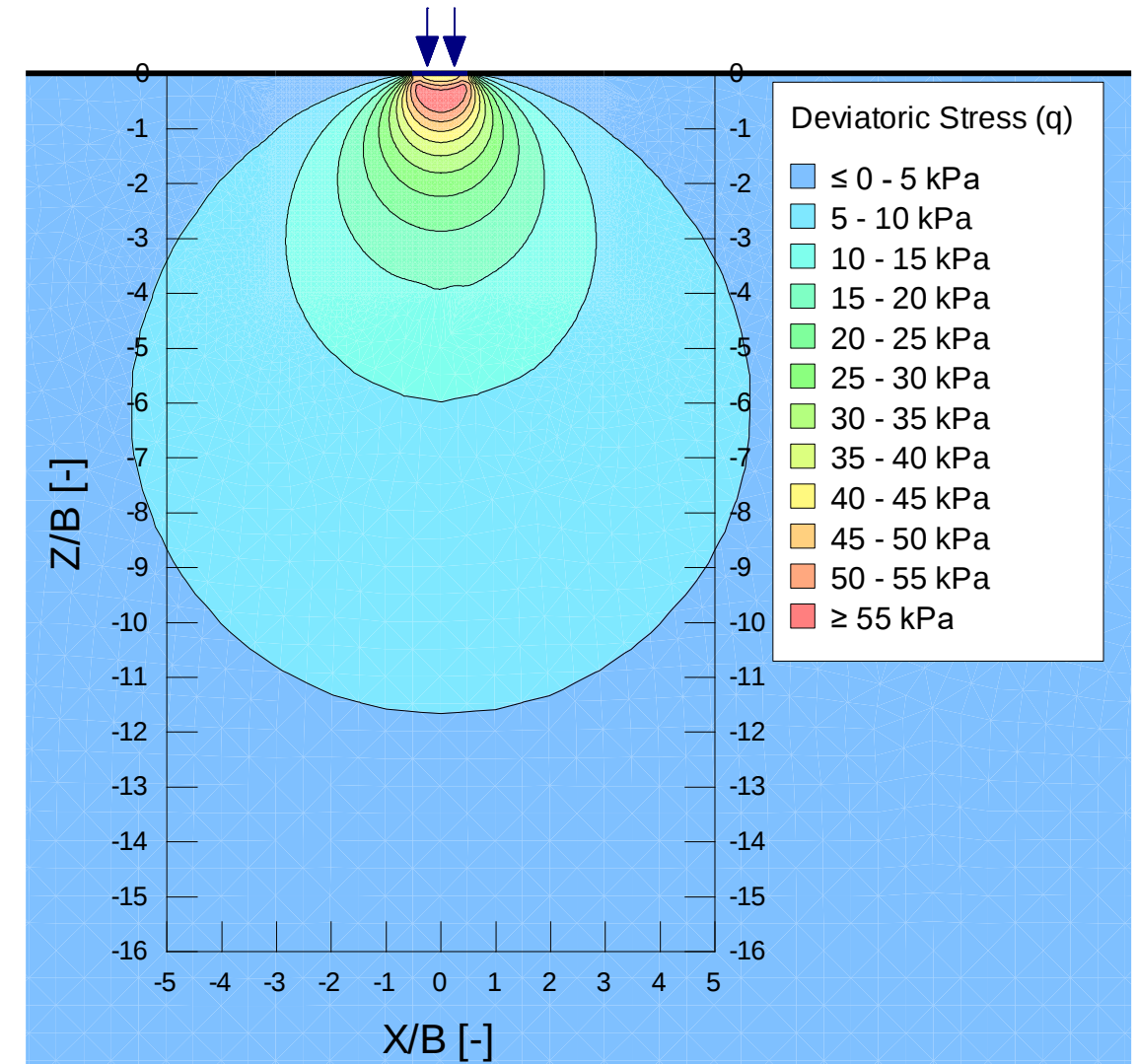
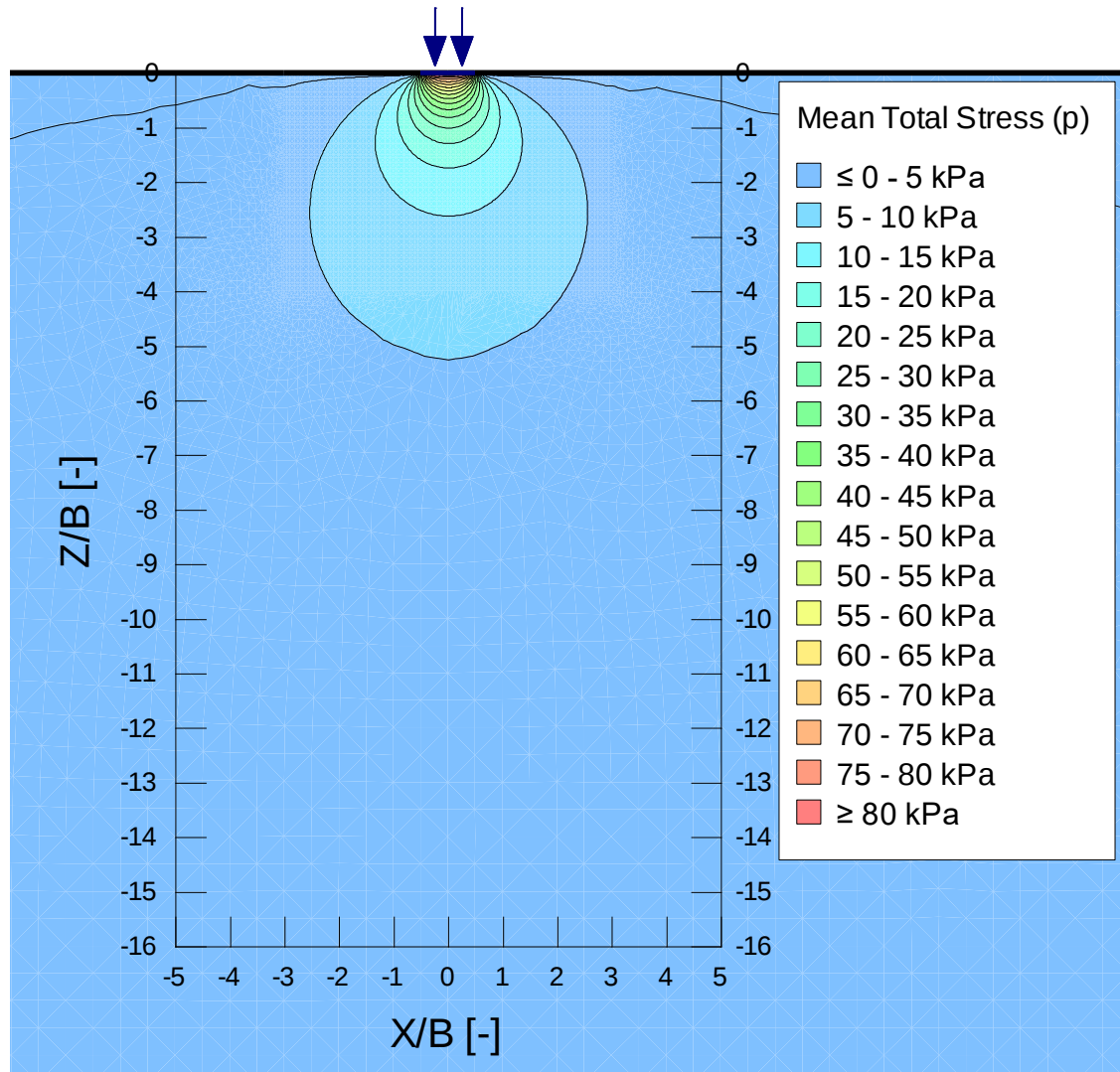


Analytical method



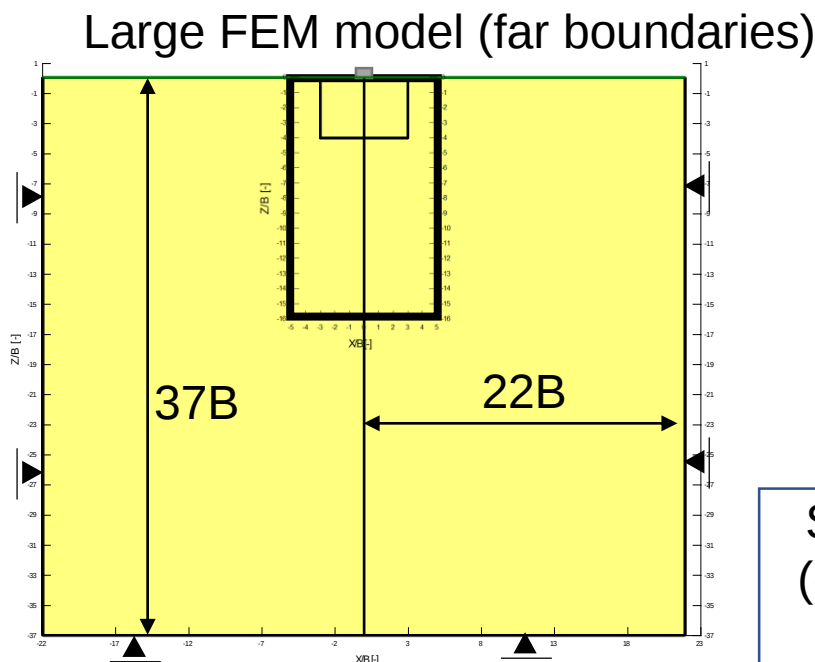
$\Delta\tau_{xz}/q$ [%]

Mean stress and deviatoric stress increment due to a uniform strip load

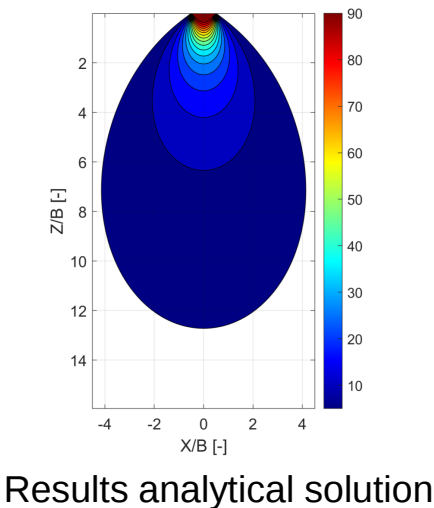
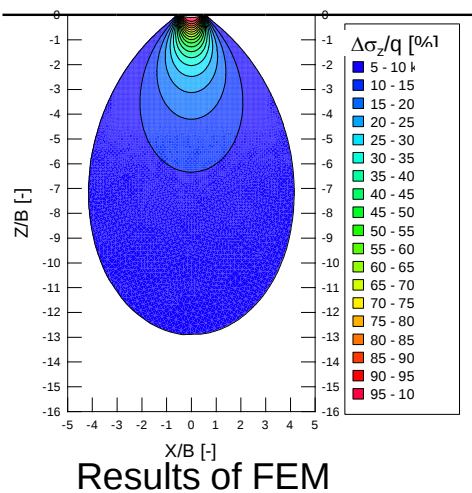


Increment of vertical stress due to a uniform strip load:

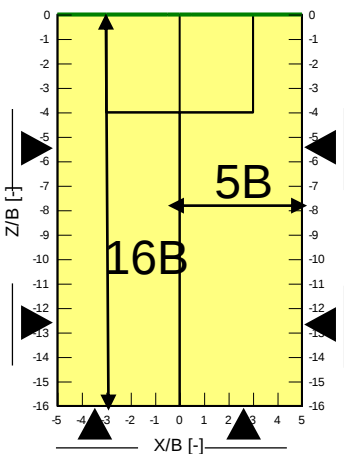
Effect of model size in FEM



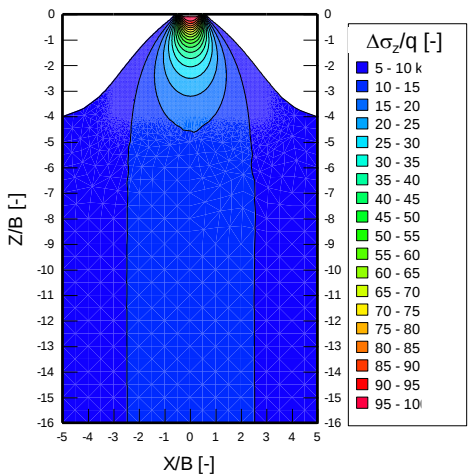
Good agreement with analytical solution



Small FEM model (close boundaries)



Results of FEM



Bad agreement with analytical solution!

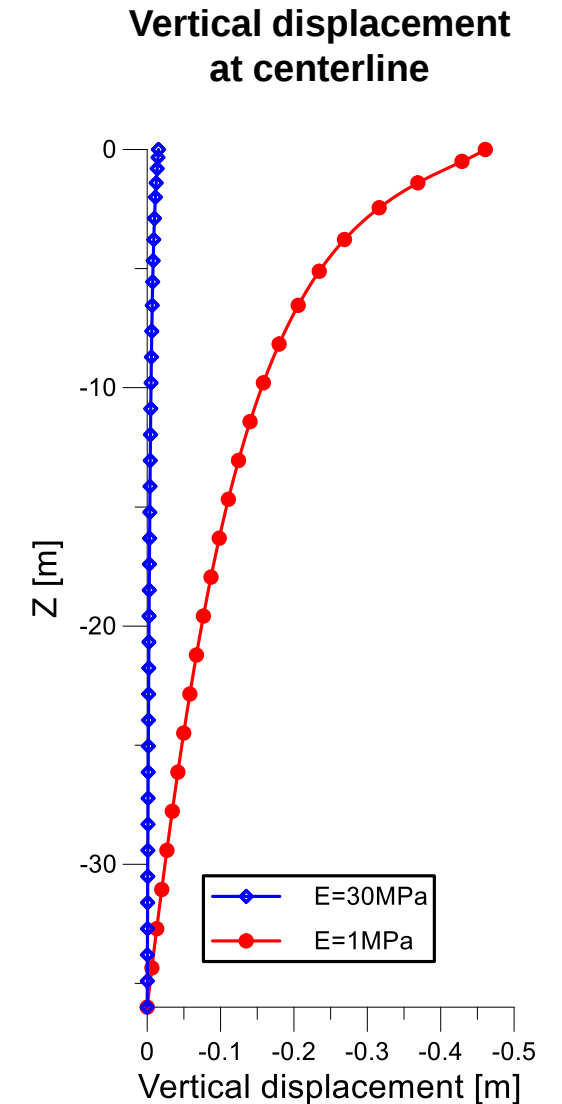
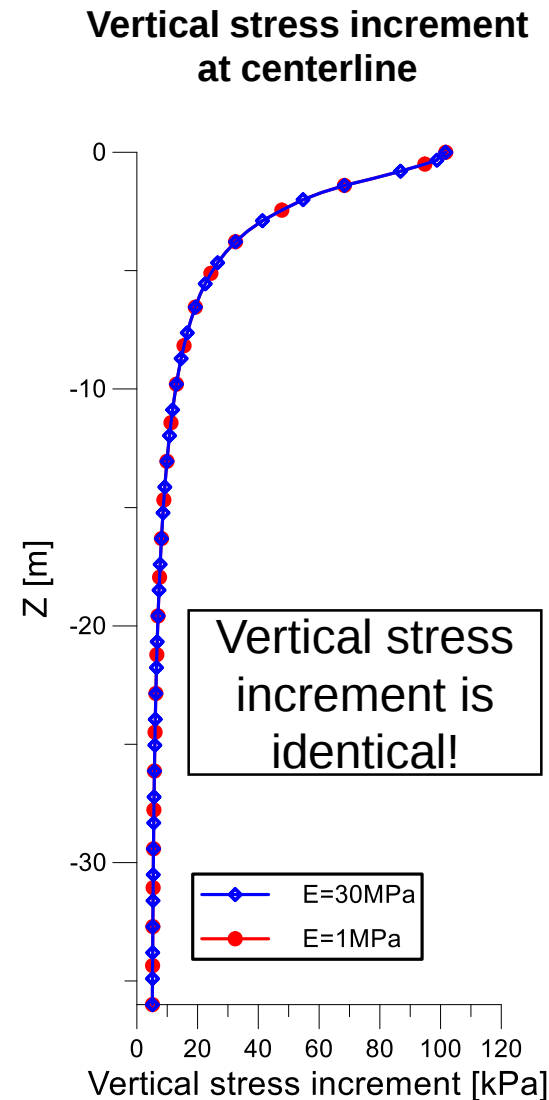
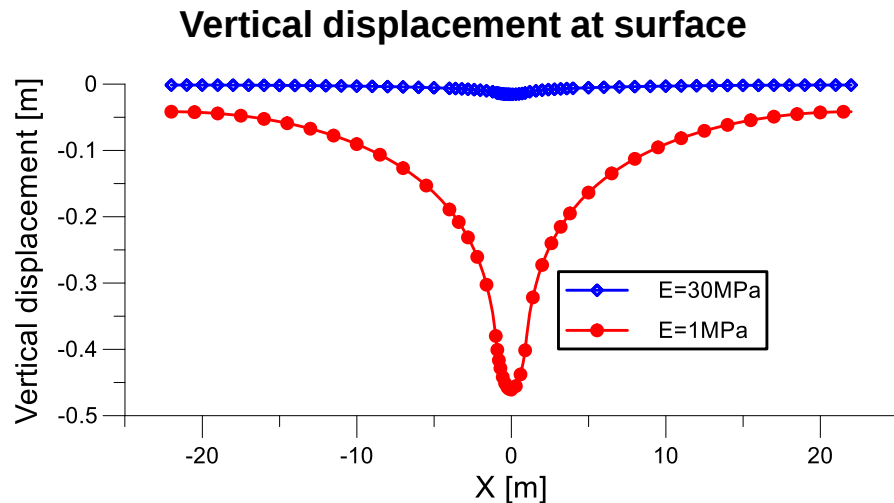


Numerical solution

Feature	Model 1 (Analytical Comparison)	Model 2 (Elastic - Medium Dense Sand)	Model 3 (Elastic - Soft Clay)	Model 4 (Mohr-Coulomb - Medium Dense Sand)	Model 5 (Modified Cam Clay)	Model 6 (Modified Cam Clay - Excavation)
Load Entity	100kPa	100kPa	100kPa			
Load Width	1m	2m	2m			
Material Model	Linear Elastic	Linear Elastic	Linear Elastic			
Material parameters	E=30000kPa, v=0.3	E=30000kPa v=0.3	E=1000kPa v=0.3			
Soil Unit Weight	0	20 kN/m ³	20 kN/m ³			
Notes	No gravity, used for comparison with analytical solution	Simulates medium dense sand	Simulates soft clay			

Vertical displacement due to a uniform strip load: effect of Young modulus

Learning outcome: displacement are larger in soft soils even if the stress increment is identical.





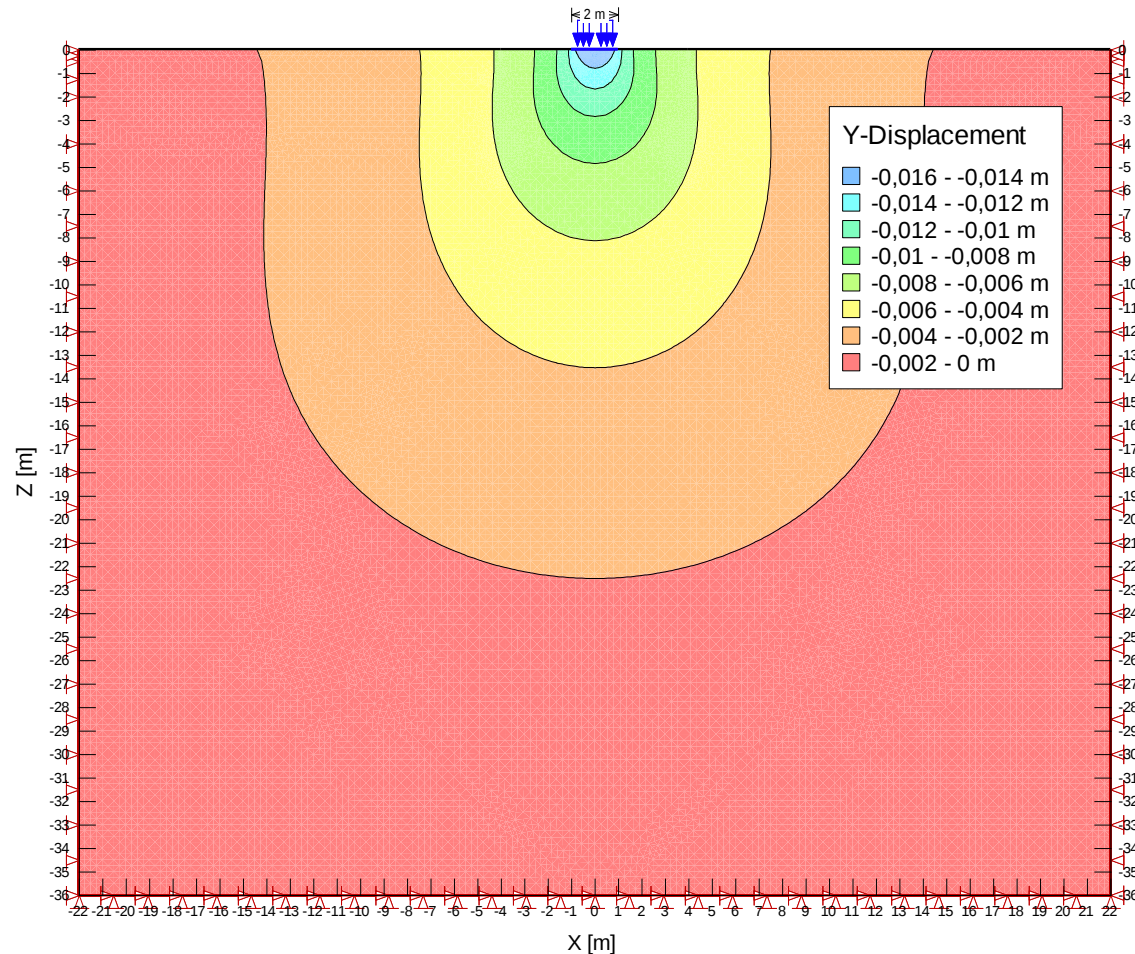
Numerical solution

Feature	Model 1 (Analytical Comparison)	Model 2 (Elastic - Medium Dense Sand)	Model 3 (Elastic - Soft Clay)	Model 4 (Mohr-Coulomb - Medium Dense Sand)	Model 5 (Modified Cam Clay)	Model 6 (Modified Cam Clay - Excavation)
Load Entity	100kPa	100kPa	100kPa	100kPa		
Load Width	1m	2m	2m	2m		
Material Model	Linear Elastic	Linear Elastic	Linear Elastic	Elastic-Perfectly Plastic (Mohr-Coulomb)		
Material parameters	E=30000kPa, $\nu=0.3$	E=30000kPa , $\nu=0.3$	E=1000kPa , $\nu=0.3$	E=30000kPa $\nu=0.3$ $\phi=35^\circ$		
Soil Unit Weight	0	20 kN/m ³	20 kN/m ³	20 kN/m ³		
Notes	No gravity, used for comparison with analytical solution	Simulates medium dense sand	Simulates soft clay	Sher failure mechanism included in the model		

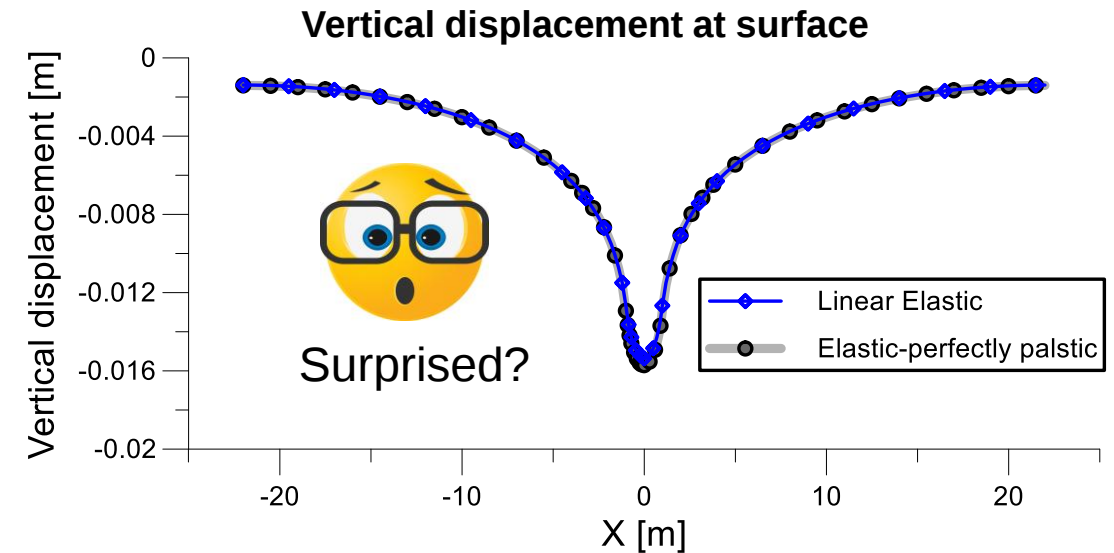
Vertical displacement due to a uniform strip load:

Linear elastic (LE) vs elastic-perfectly plastic soil (EP) with Mohr-Coulomb failure criterion

Contour of vertical displacement in FEM analysis:
LE and EP are identical!



Learning outcome: when the load is small, the displacements calculate with LE and EP is identical.



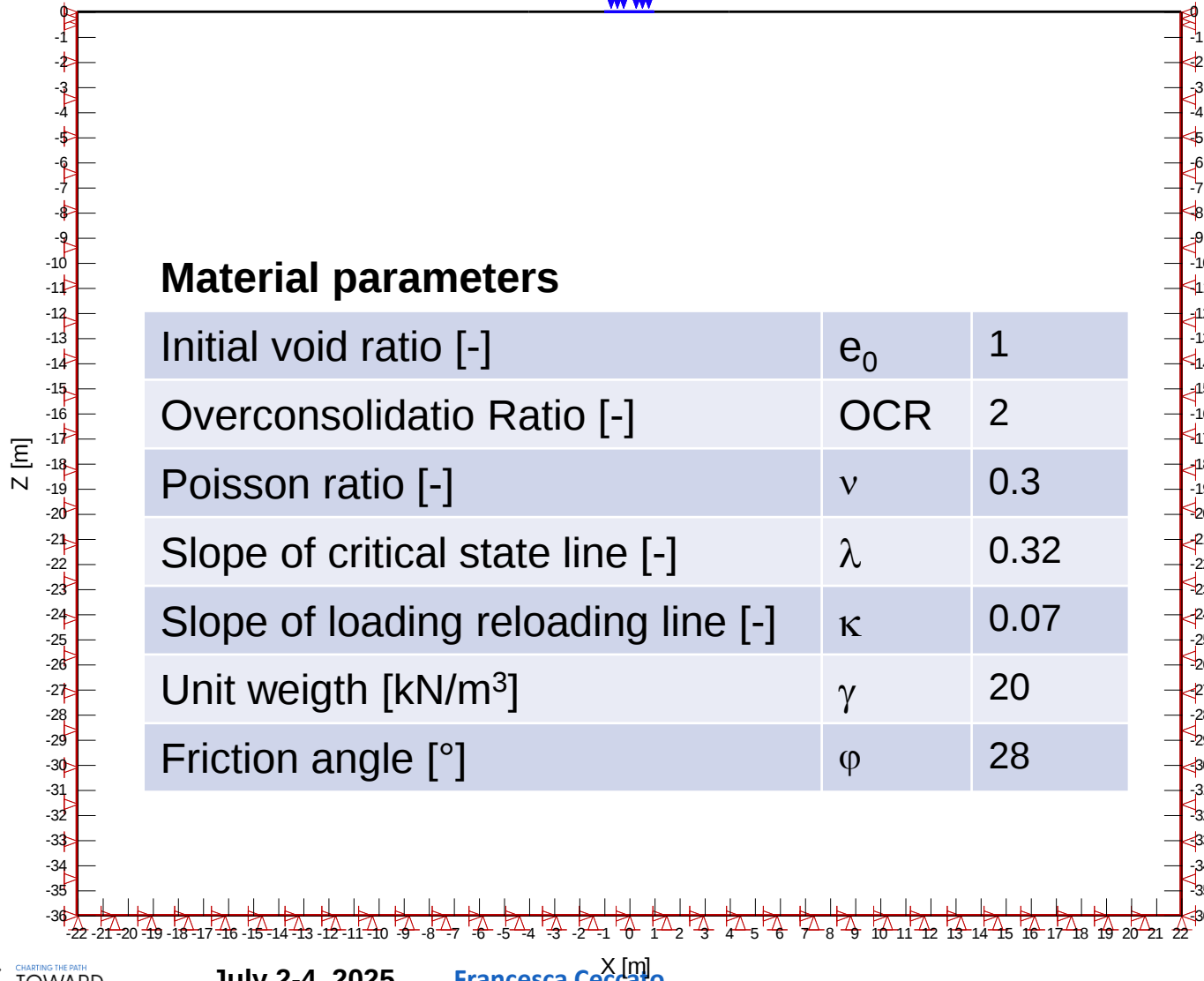


Numerical solution

Feature	Model 1 (Analytical Comparison)	Model 2 (Elastic - Medium Dense Sand)	Model 3 (Elastic - Soft Clay)	Model 4 (Mohr-Coulomb - Medium Dense Sand)	Model 5 (Modified Cam Clay)	Model 6 (Modified Cam Clay - Excavation)
Load Entity	100kPa	100kPa	100kPa	100kPa	100kPa	100kPa
Load Width	1m	2m	2m	2m	2m	2m (applied at excavation bottom)
Material Model	Linear Elastic	Linear Elastic	Linear Elastic	Elastic-Perfectly Plastic (Mohr-Coulomb)	Modified Cam Clay	Modified Cam Clay
Material parameters	E=30000kPa, $\nu=0.3$	E=30000kPa , $\nu=0.3$	E=1000kPa , $\nu=0.3$	E=30000kPa $\nu=0.3$ $\phi=35^\circ$	Table 2	Table 2
Soil Unit Weight	0	20 kN/m ³	20 kN/m ³	20 kN/m ³	20 kN/m ³	20 kN/m ³
Notes	No gravity, used for comparison with analytical solution	Simulates medium dense sand	Simulates soft clay	Sher failure mechanism included in the model	This model has convergence issues	Load applied at excavation bottom

Vertical displacement due to a uniform strip load on clay:

Modified Cam Clay Model (MCC) vs Linear Elastic model (LE)– load on the surface



Load $q=100\text{kPa}$ applied on the surface.

The simulation does not converge!

How will you explain it to your students?

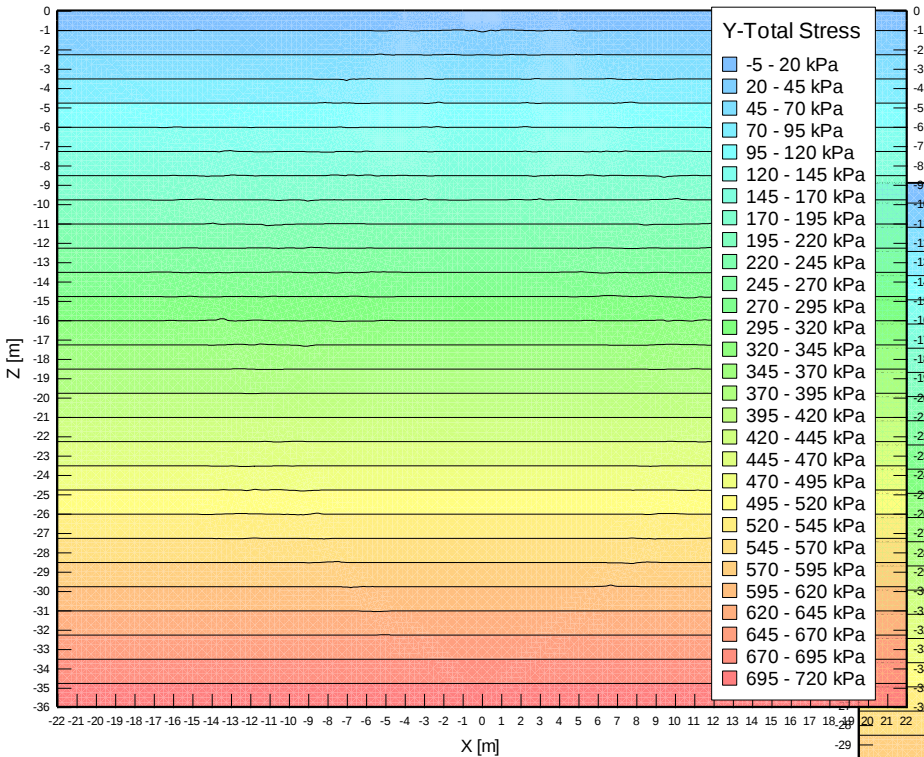


Vertical displacement due to a uniform strip load on clay:

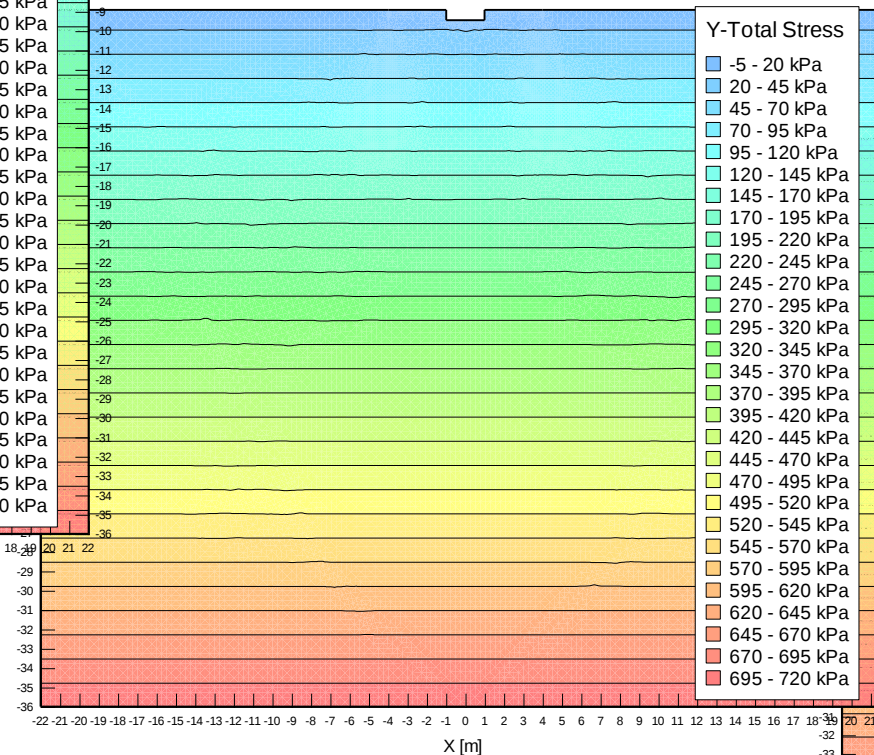
Modified Cam Clay Model (MCC) vs Linear Elastic model (LE)– load on a small excavation

Calculation steps:

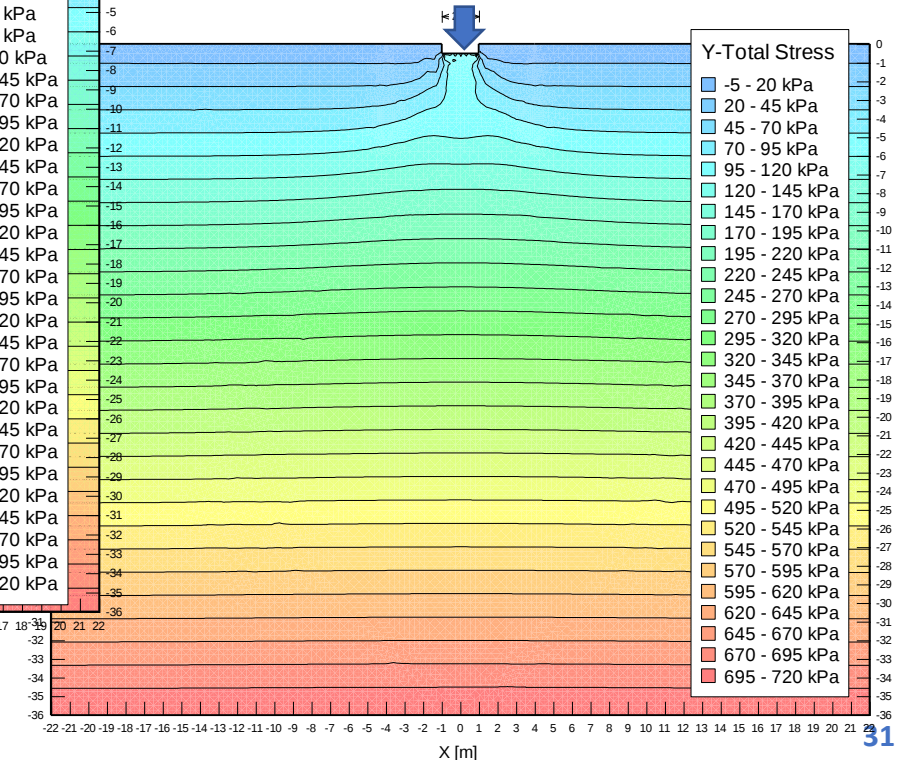
1. Generation of in-situ stresses



2. Small excavation (0.5m)



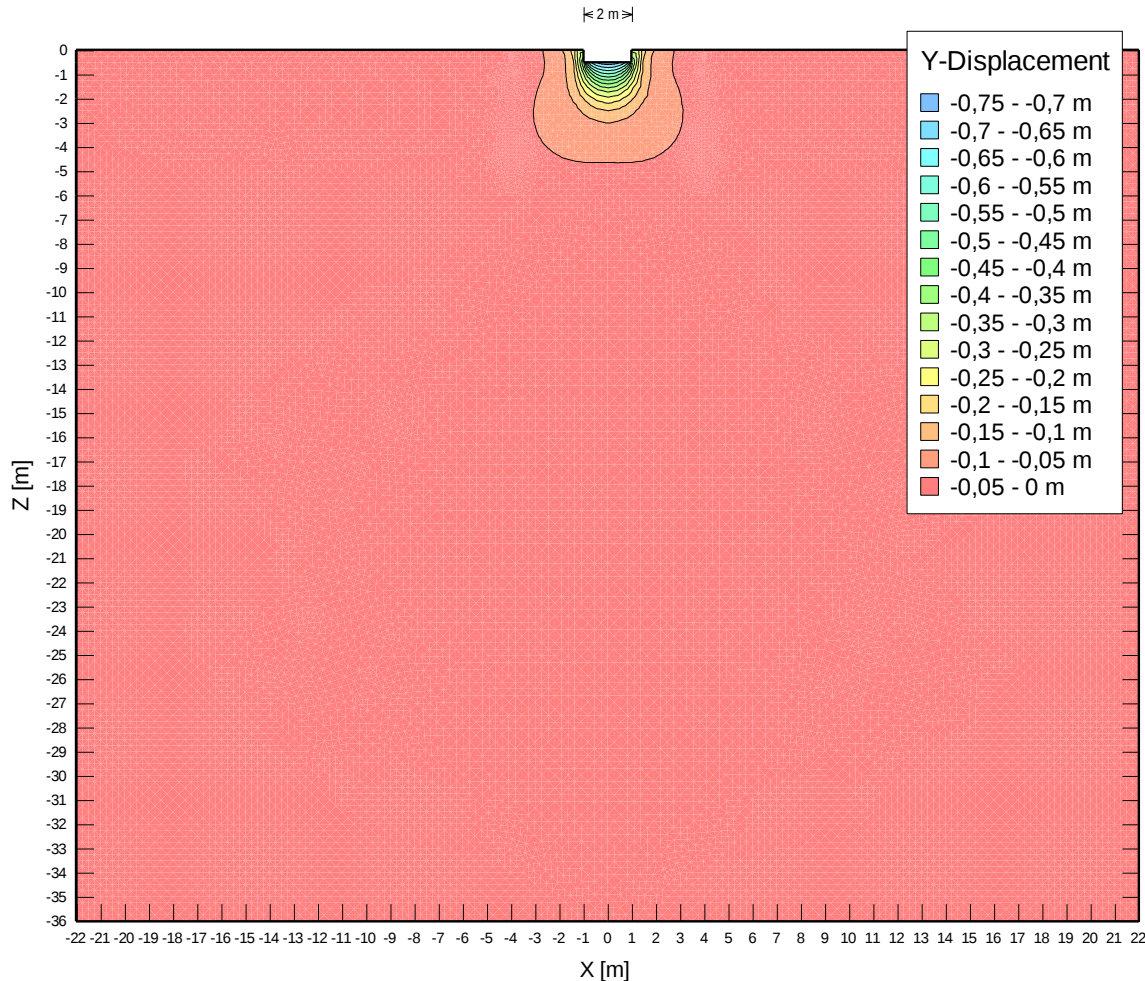
3. Load application



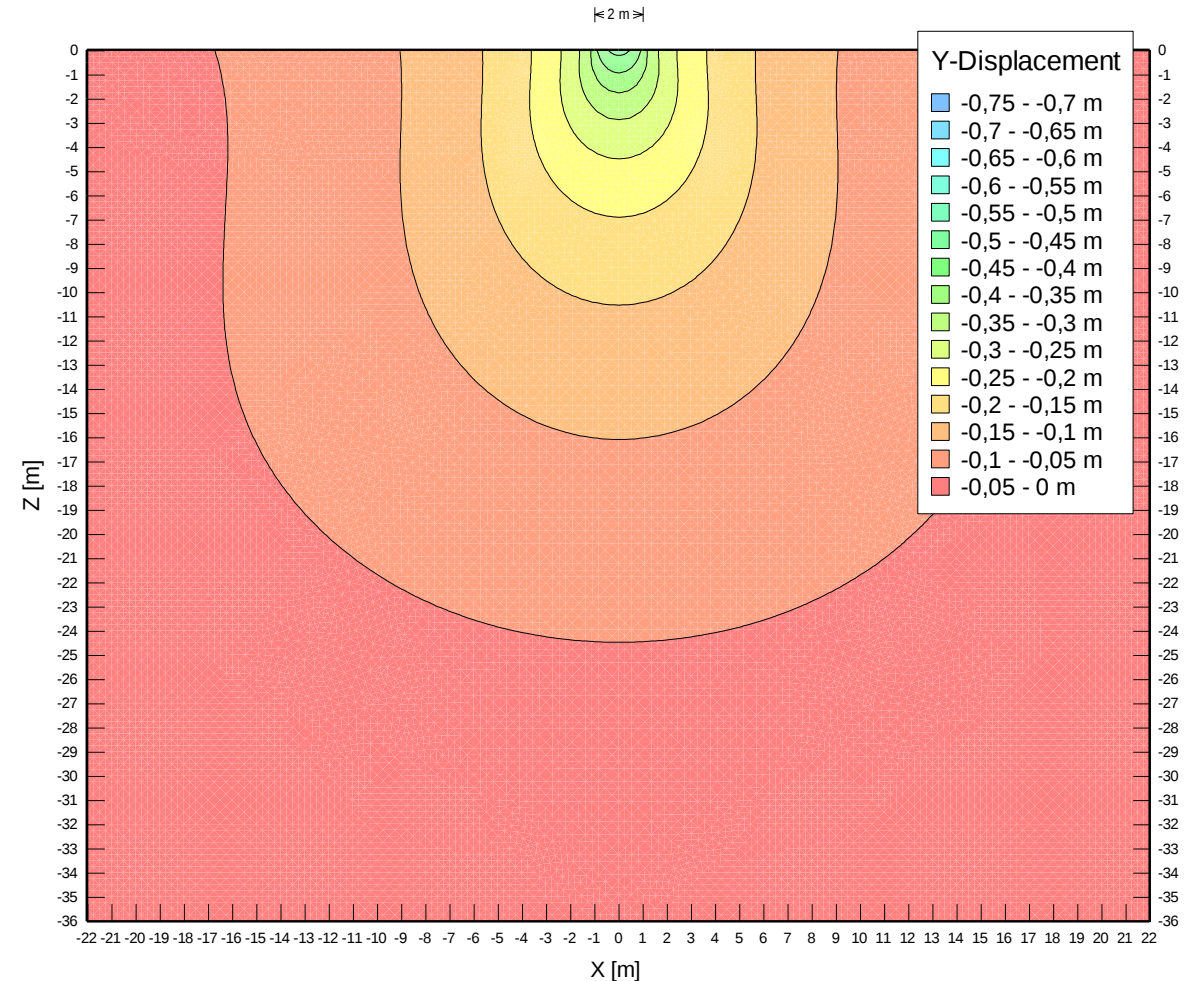
Vertical displacement due to a uniform strip load on clay:

Modified Cam Clay Model (MCC) vs Linear Elastic model (LE)– load on a small excavation

Modified Cam Clay Model

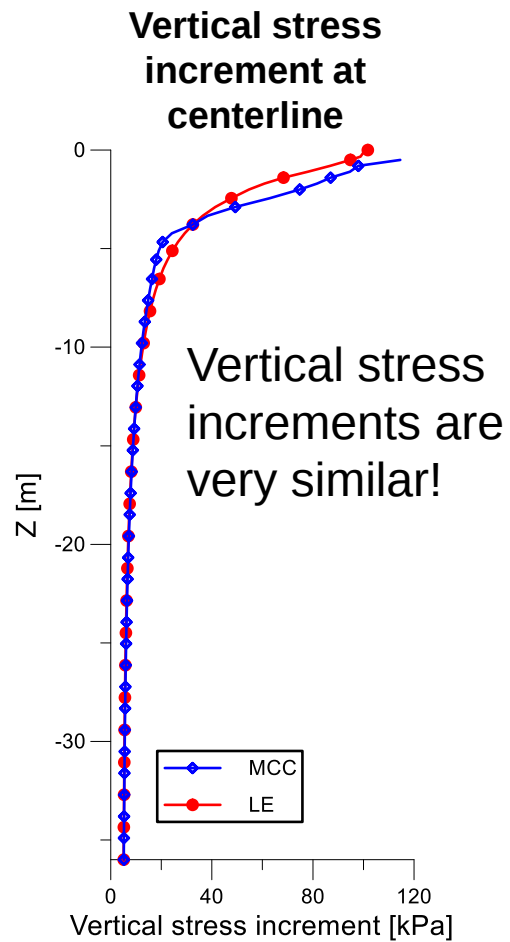


Linear Elastic model ($E=1000\text{kPa}$, $\nu=0.3$)

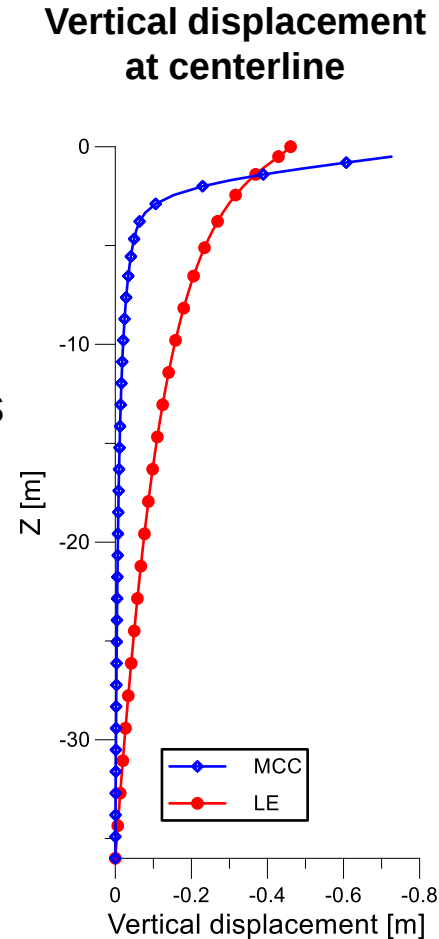


Vertical displacement due to a uniform strip load on clay:

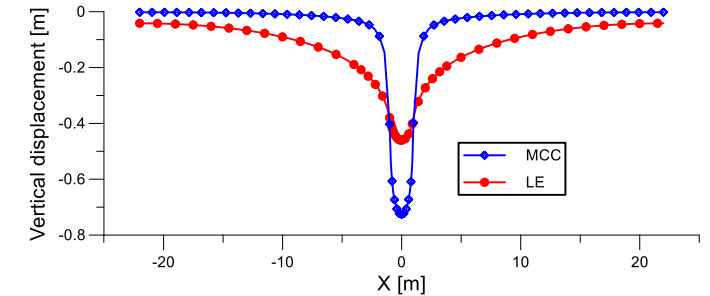
Modified Cam Clay Model (MCC) vs Linear Elastic model (LE)– load on a small excavation



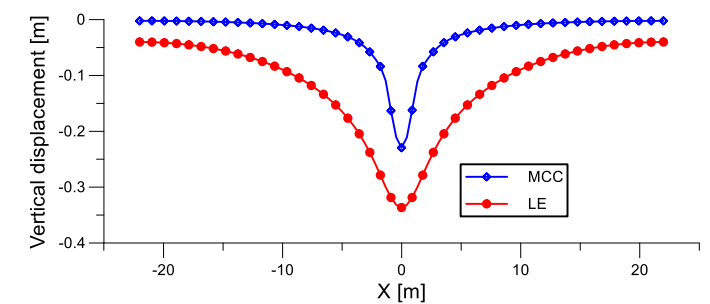
Vertical displacements are totally different!



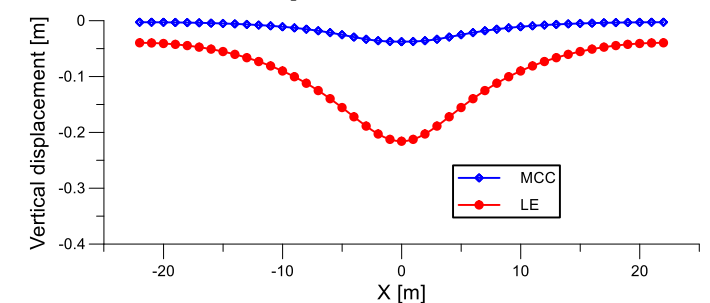
Vertical displacement at depth of foundation plane



Vertical displacement at Z=-2m



Vertical displacement at Z=-6m



Using Material in Basic Courses

- Enhance student learning experience
- Improve digital literacy
- Improve fundamental understanding of soil behavior
- Visualize stress distributions, displacements
- Improve critical thinking

Using Materials in Advanced Courses

- Enhance critical thinking
- Examples for discussion
- Model limitations
- Assignments involving model implementation, variations

Effort Required & Importance Collaboration

- Preparing high-quality educational materials requires a significant effort:
 - Coding (1.5h Matlab),
 - model setup (2h FEM),
 - post-processing (10h),
 - Documentation (5h).
- Review of educational material requires significant effort

An engaged Geotechnical Engineering Educator community is necessary!

Conclusions

- Collaborative initiative for high-quality educational materials
- Preparing high-quality materials requires significant effort (coding, modeling, visualization, documentation)
- Undertaking as a community mitigates solitude in teaching

Teaching numerical methods or teaching with numerical methods?

We can do both!

Numerical methods can create effective figures to illustrate soil mechanics concepts, but don't give the impression that numerical models are superior. Encourage critical thinking!

Can we use numerical methods in education without teaching the underlying mathematical details?

Maybe...

Don't ask students to «believe» to the results, but encourage curiosity.