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1     **Measurement of the thermal properties of unsaturated compacted soil by**  
2                                   **the transfer function estimation method**

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24 Abstract:

25 Thermal energy storage in embankments can be considered a new economically efficient and  
26 environmentally friendly technology in geotechnical engineering. In these structures, horizontal  
27 heat exchanger loops can be installed inside different layers of compacted soil to store heat in  
28 the medium during the summer to be extracted during the winter. Compacted soils are usually  
29 unsaturated; therefore, reliable estimates and measurements of unsaturated compacted soil  
30 thermal properties, such as the volumetric heat capacity, thermal conductivity, and thermal  
31 diffusivity, are important in the efficiency analysis of these structures. However, there is no  
32 available method to characterize the evolution of these parameters over time in compacted soil.

33 In this study, several temperature sensors were placed inside different layers of unsaturated  
34 compacted soil in a cylindrical container (height of 0.8 m and diameter of 0.6 m) to monitor  
35 imposed temperature cycle variations. An inverse analytical model based on the one-  
36 dimensional radial heat conduction equation is proposed to estimate the thermal diffusivity  
37 using the temperature variation between two temperature sensors. The volumetric heat capacity  
38 was measured with a calorimeter in the laboratory, enabling estimation of the thermal  
39 conductivity of the compacted soil. Then, this estimated thermal conductivity was compared  
40 with the thermal conductivity values measured with two different methods (one steady-state  
41 and one transient-state method). The estimated thermal conductivity was close to the value  
42 measured with the transient-state method. It was demonstrated that steady-state methods are  
43 not suitable for the measurement of thermal conductivities as high as  $2.5 \text{ W} \cdot \text{m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$  since  
44 thermal contact resistances are no longer negligible.

45 Keywords: Soil thermal properties, transfer function, unsaturated compacted soil, inverse  
46 analytical model

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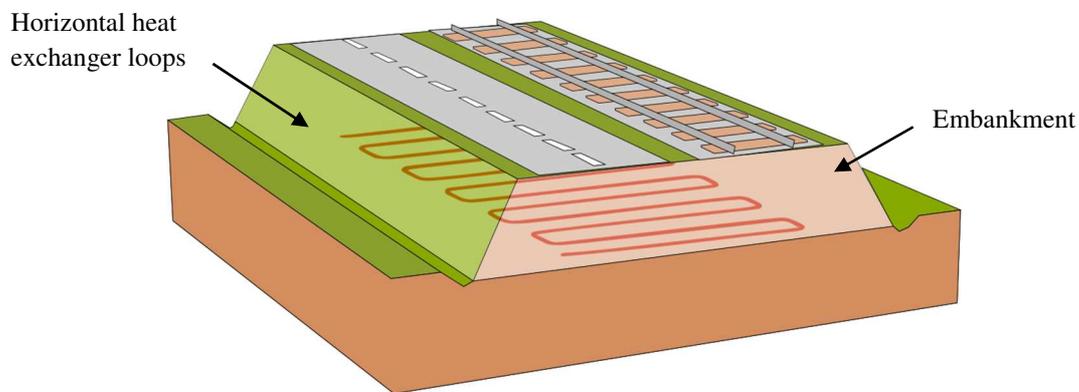
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53 1 Introduction

54 In recent years, due to the depletion of fossil resources and their negative impact on the  
55 environment, there is a tendency towards using renewable energy. Among the different types  
56 of renewable energies, solar energy provides an abundant, clean and safe energy source. The  
57 supply of this energy is periodic, following yearly and daily cycles [1]. Various techniques have  
58 been developed to store solar energy in a proper medium for use in high-demand periods.  
59 Thermal energy storage is a technique that can be described as the short- or long-term storage  
60 of thermal energy by heating a storage medium. Seasonal thermal energy storage stores solar  
61 energy that is diffused in the summer for space heating in the winter [2]. Thermal energy can  
62 be stored by inserting vertical or horizontal heat exchanger loops into a storage medium. Several  
63 studies have shown that seasonal thermal energy storage is a pertinent technique that has been  
64 used in geologic storage media, such as soil, due to its appropriate thermal properties and ease  
65 of access [3,4].

66 In geotechnical engineering, different types of structures are made of unsaturated compacted  
67 soil, for example, road and rail embankments and dikes. Generally, these linear structures  
68 contain several layers of unsaturated compacted soils. Horizontal heat exchanger loops can  
69 easily be installed in these layers during the construction phase (Figure 1) [5,6].



70

71 *Figure 1: Forecast embankment thermal storage.*

72 However, the cyclic temperature variations in these structures could modify the thermo-hydro-  
73 mechanical (THM) behaviour of the soil, and these variations may consequently affect the  
74 expected mechanical performance of the structures and heat storage efficiency [7,8,9].  
75 Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of the following aspects is needed:

- 76 1) Determination of the thermal characteristics of unsaturated compacted soil to optimize the  
77 heat storage energy amount.

- 78 2) Examination of the effect of temperature variations on the THM behaviour of unsaturated  
79 compacted soil.
- 80 3) Investigation of the interaction between unsaturated compacted soil and heat exchanger  
81 loops.

82 This study focuses on the thermal parameters of unsaturated compacted soil to optimize the  
83 efficiency of thermal storage structures. The thermal properties that affect the heat storage  
84 capacity are the volumetric heat capacity  $C_v$  ( $J.m^{-3}.K^{-1}$ ), the thermal conductivity  $\lambda$   
85 ( $W.m^{-1}.K^{-1}$ ) and the thermal diffusivity  $\alpha$  ( $m^2.s^{-1}$ ). The relationship between these thermal  
86 properties is as follows:

$$87 \quad \alpha = \frac{\lambda}{C_v} \quad (1)$$

88 The soil thermal properties change according to its physical and hydro-mechanical properties,  
89 such as the mineral composition, degree of saturation and dry density [10-12]. The variation of  
90 these properties coupled with the thermal solicitations in unsaturated soil can reach a high level  
91 of complexity, which causes difficulties in evaluating the thermal properties of these soils [13].  
92 Additionally, in an unsaturated medium, due to such a complex multiphase medium, heat is  
93 transferred by three different modes: conduction through the solid particles, convection through  
94 the gaseous and liquid phases, and radiation at the particle surfaces. However, due to the  
95 complex combination of these phases in unsaturated soil, most of the measurement and  
96 estimation methods applied to unsaturated soil to measure its thermal properties are based on  
97 the solution of a one-dimensional heat conduction equation assuming a homogeneous soil [14-  
98 16].

99 The thermal properties of soils can be measured indirectly with steady-state or transient-state  
100 methods by measuring the rise or fall of the temperature in response to a heat flux [17,18].  
101 Steady-state methods are used to measure thermal properties when the heat transfer flux  
102 through the sample remains unchanged over time. The reference steady-state method to  
103 measure the thermal conductivity is the guarded hot plate method, which is performed on  
104 samples with a minimum cross-section of  $0.3 \times 0.3 \text{ m}^2$  [19,20]. The centred hot plate method  
105 enables measurement of the thermal conductivity of smaller samples, with a  $0.1 \times 0.1 \text{ m}^2$  cross-  
106 section [21,22].

107 Transient methods are used to measure thermal properties during the unsteady-state heat  
108 transfer process. The thermal needle probe and infrared thermal imaging methods are often used  
109 to measure the thermal conductivity and thermal diffusivity of soil samples in the laboratory

110 and field, respectively [14,19,23,24]. However, these transient methods only obtain a single  
111 reading at the corresponding time and cannot measure the temperature profile along the soil  
112 depth in the field, which is the inherent limitation of these techniques [15].

113 In the field, the thermal diffusivity can also be estimated by monitoring the temperature of the  
114 soil via a thermal response test [25, 26]. The thermal response test is commonly used to estimate  
115 the thermal properties of saturated soils based on the inlet and outlet temperatures of vertical  
116 heat exchanger loops, which are inserted several tens of metres into the ground [27,28].

117 The temperature monitoring method, using different temperature sensors at different depths,  
118 has been proposed to estimate the thermal diffusivity of unsaturated soils near the ground  
119 surface [15,29,30]. Based on these methods, different analytical and numerical models were  
120 proposed to predict the heat transfer function and consequently the apparent thermal diffusivity  
121 of the medium from the observed temperature variations.

122 Gao et al. [31] and Rajeev & Kodikara [15] used simplified analytical models under the  
123 hypothesis of a sinusoidal temperature variation in the soil surface (sinusoidal boundary  
124 condition), which is not always valid in thermal energy storage since the duration of the cooling  
125 period is not necessarily as long as the heating period. This type of temperature monitoring  
126 method was also used by Ukrainczyk [16] to estimate the thermal diffusivity of complex  
127 materials. In their study, a numerical inverse solution for one-dimensional heat conduction was  
128 used, which is more complex than the direct analytical model and was only used in the  
129 laboratory.

130 Jannot & Degiovanni [32] proposed a simple inverse analytical model to estimate the thermal  
131 properties of powders or granular materials. In this method, the transfer function is not  
132 dependent on the shape and intensity of the heat flux or the external boundary condition (such  
133 as the soil surface in the field). In this temperature/temperature method, first, the transfer  
134 function between two recorded temperatures is modelled, and then an associated inverse  
135 analytical model is proposed to estimate the thermal diffusivity. To our knowledge, this  
136 analytical model has never been applied to unsaturated compacted soils. In this study, this  
137 analytical model is adapted and applied to estimate the thermal diffusivity ( $\alpha$ ) of unsaturated  
138 compacted soil by monitoring the temperature of a large-scale sample when subjected to  
139 temperature variation cycles. Then, the volumetric heat capacity,  $C_v$ , was measured in the  
140 laboratory to estimate the thermal conductivity  $\lambda$  using Eq. (1). The estimated thermal  
141 conductivity was then compared with the thermal conductivities that were measured in the

142 laboratory via two other classical methods (the transient-state and steady-state methods). If the  
143 estimated thermal conductivity validated, this method could enable system efficiency  
144 estimation of possible future applications of thermal energy storage in compacted soils such as  
145 embankments or other configurations.

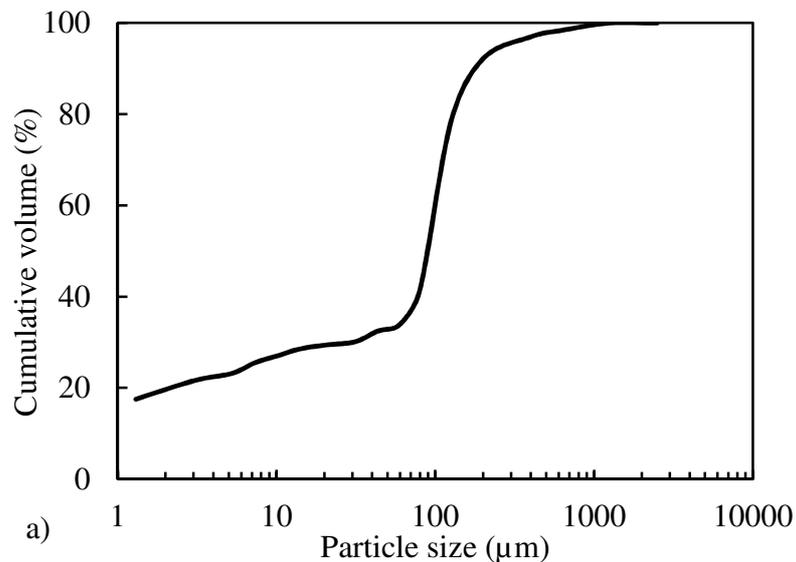
## 146 2 Materials and methods

147 In this section, the properties of the studied material are first presented, and then the different  
148 methods used to estimate the thermal properties of unsaturated compacted soil are detailed.

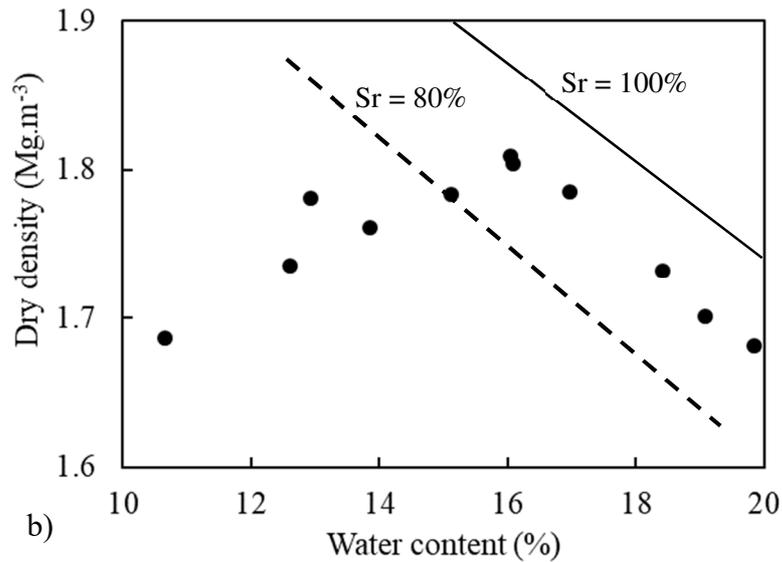
### 149 2.1 Material properties

150 The tested soil was extracted from the Paris region in France. X-ray diffractogram analysis  
151 revealed that the soil contains 81% quartz, 7% dolomite, 5% calcite, 5% clay minerals and 3%  
152 feldspar [33]. This material was dried, pulverized and passed through a 2 mm sieve before  
153 being used for the various experiments. According to the particle-size distribution, almost 20%  
154 of the soil particles were smaller than 2  $\mu\text{m}$ , and 41% were smaller than 80  $\mu\text{m}$  (Figure 2a).  
155 With a liquid limit (LL) of 27% and a plastic limit (PL) of 21%, the plasticity index (PI) was  
156 6% [34]. The standard Proctor curve of the material [35] showed an optimum water content  
157 ( $w_{\text{opt}}$ ) of 16% and a maximum dry density ( $\rho_d$ ) of 1.81  $\text{Mg} \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$  (Figure 2b).

158



159



160

161 *Figure 2: Characteristics of the studied soil: a) particle size distribution and b) compaction*  
 162 *curve, Sr: The degree of saturation.*

163 The material was classified as a sandy lean clay, CL, according to the Unified Soil  
 164 Classification System [36] and as A1 in the French standard for soil classification [37].

165 To optimize the efficiency of thermal embankment storage, the variation of the thermal  
 166 properties of the soil with the dry density and degree of saturation were investigated. In  
 167 accordance with the literature, Bristow [38] and Smits et al. [39] observed that thermal  
 168 properties increased with an increase in the degree of saturation or dry density. Boukelia et al.  
 169 [33] showed that the maximum values of the thermal conductivity and volumetric heat capacity  
 170 of the studied soil were reached at a water content of 16.3% and a dry density of 1.79 Mg.m<sup>-3</sup>.  
 171 However, this compaction state could not be reached in the large-scale experimental container.  
 172 As a consequence, the reference compaction state in this study was a water content of 16.3%  
 173 and a dry density of 1.72 Mg.m<sup>-3</sup>.

## 174 2.2 Transfer function estimation method (TFEM)

175 To prepare the sample for temperature monitoring, the soil was compacted in a container with  
 176 a height of 0.8 m and a diameter of 0.6 m with a pneumatic compactor (Figure 3a). This large-  
 177 scale sample was realized to reproduce the in situ conditions. The compactor applied dynamic  
 178 forces on a metallic plate, which was 0.04 m thick and 0.6 m in diameter, placed on top of the  
 179 material to ensure homogeneous soil compaction. To ensure a homogeneous density the massif,  
 180 compaction was performed in eleven 0.07 m thick layers.

181 Five temperature sensors, PT100 (6 mm in diameter and 60 mm in length), were positioned in

182 different layers of the compacted soil (T3 to T7, Figure 3a) and plugged into a data logger to  
183 monitor the temperature variations inside the compacted soil. The temperature was recorded  
184 every 50 s using the five temperature sensors. To induce cyclic variations of the temperature,  
185 an ethylene glycol-water solution was circulated through a stainless steel tube which was  
186 welded to the outside of the container (Figure 3c). A heating-cooling system (Vulcatherm  
187 thermoregulator, with a 6 kW heating capacity) imposed three successive heating-cooling  
188 cycles in the range of 20 to 50 °C (Figure 3d). Thermal equilibrium was reached for each step  
189 before changing, and the entire test lasted one week. Insulating sleeves were placed around the  
190 tube to reduce the amount of heat exchange with the surrounding atmosphere. Plastic film was  
191 placed on top of the container to preserve the initial water content. Finally, the entire device  
192 was placed in a box made of 0.04 m thick extruded polystyrene plates to reinforce the thermal  
193 insulation effect (Figure 3c).

### 194 2.3 Water content and density profile measurements

195 Six cores with a diameter of 28 mm were positioned on a concentric circle with a diameter half  
196 the size of that of the container (Figure 3b). The 630-mm-length cores were divided into small  
197 segments to measure the water content and density of the material as a function of depth. The  
198 measurements for two of the cores were conducted at the beginning of the test (20 a-b), and the  
199 measurements for two other cores were carried out at the end of the first heating cycle (50 a-b),  
200 while the two remaining cores were analysed at the end of the test (20 c-d) (Figure 3b, 3d).  
201 These results allowed us to assess the initial homogeneity of the sample and to evaluate any  
202 variations due to the temperature changes.

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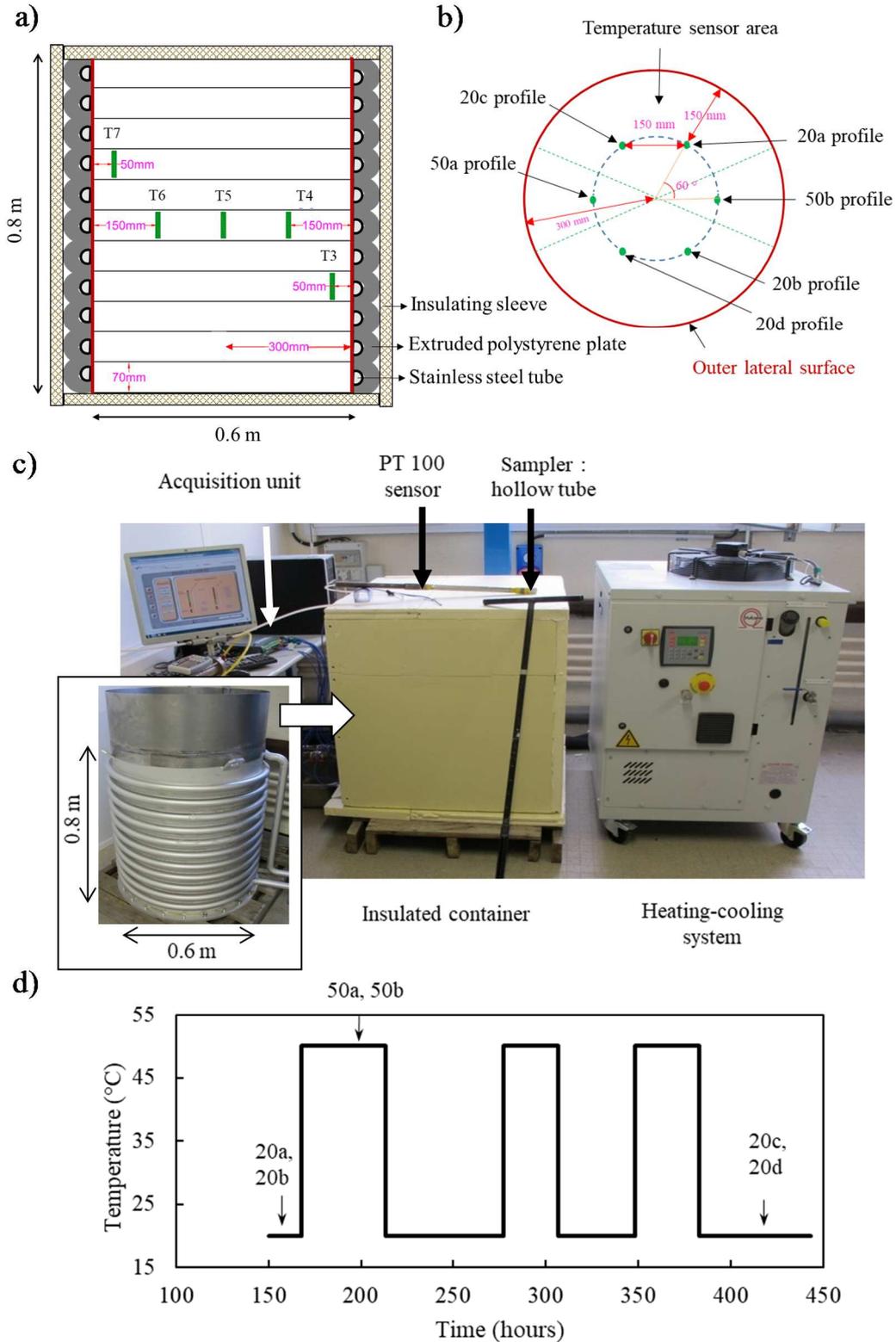
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214 *Figure 3: Details of the developed laboratory model a) cross sectional view of the thermo-*  
 215 *regulated metric scale container and the place of the temperature sensors (T3 to T7) b) top*  
 216 *view of the thermo-regulated metric scale container and the position of the cores profiles: 20*  
 217 *a-b: two cores before first heating, 50 a-b: two cores after the first heating and 20 c-d:*  
 218 *two cores after the third heating and cooling cycle c) experimental setup d) three temperature*  
 219 *cycles imposed using heating and cooling system and cores section times.*

220 2.4 Other methods for measuring the thermal properties

221 To validate the proposed TFEM method, the thermal properties were measured by other  
222 methods.

223 A micro-differential scanning calorimeter (DSC, SETARAM µdsc3) was used to measure the  
224 specific heat ( $C_{dry}$ ) of dry soil at different temperatures.

225 The specific heat ( $C_p$ ) of soil at a certain mass water content ( $w$ ) can be deduced by:

$$226 \quad C_p = \frac{C_{dry} + w C_{water}}{1 + w} \quad (2)$$

227 where  $C_{water}$  is the specific heat of pure water ( $C_{water} = 4180 \text{ J. kg}^{-1}. \text{ K}^{-1}$  at  $20 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ).

228 The volumetric heat capacity  $C_v$  ( $\text{J. m}^{-3}. \text{ K}^{-1}$ ) is then given by:

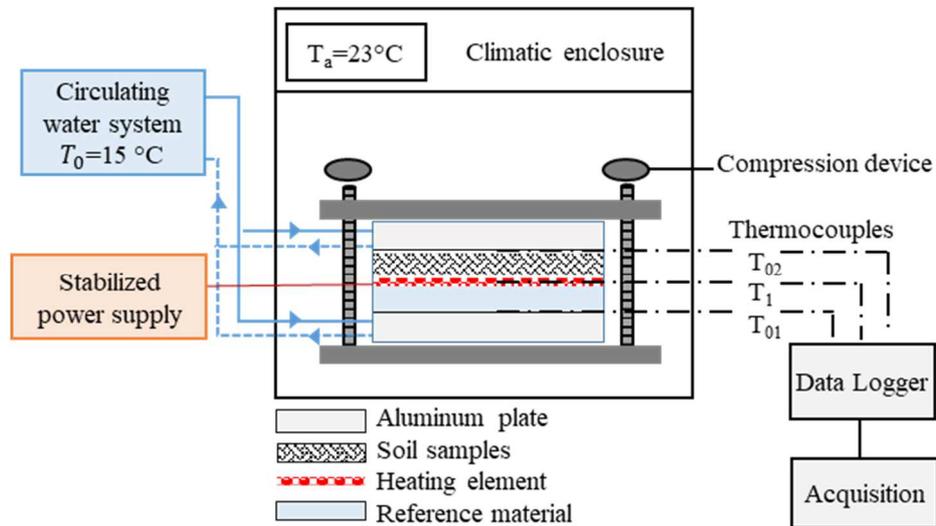
$$229 \quad C_v = \rho C_p \quad (3)$$

230 where  $\rho$  is the density of wet soil ( $\text{kg. m}^{-3}$ ).

231 The thermal conductivity was also measured by two other methods:

232 - Transient-state method: a KD2 Pro Analyser and a single-needle probe (TR-1) with a 2.4  
233 mm diameter and 100 mm length were used to measure the thermal conductivity of the  
234 compacted soil samples. This method is a transient-state technique that measures the thermal  
235 conductivity through the transient line heat source method [40]. The single-needle probe  
236 (TR-1) was covered with a thin layer of grease to improve the contact between the probe and  
237 the soil. Then, it was inserted into the sample that was already compacted in three layers at  
238 the desired water content and dry density in a standard Proctor mould with a 0.116 m height  
239 and 0.101 m diameter. A waiting time of 15 min was allowed before each test so that the  
240 equilibrium temperature between the probe and the soil was reached. The presented values  
241 are the mean values of 4 tests performed at different locations in the sample. The thermal  
242 conductivity measurement range of this probe is from  $0.2$  to  $4 \text{ W. m}^{-1}. \text{ K}^{-1}$  with an accuracy  
243 of  $\pm 10\%$  [40].

244 - Steady-state method: the centred hot plate method [21,22] is a steady-state method that  
245 consists of inserting a thin planar heating element between the soil and a reference material  
246 of known thermal conductivity (Figure 4). A constant heat flux is produced by the heating  
247 element. The soil samples were compacted in a special mould ( $0.1 \times 0.1 \times 0.02 \text{ m}^3$ ) via the  
248 static compaction method (Figure 5a and 5b). The assembly was inserted between two  
249 aluminium plates that were maintained at a constant temperature ( $T_0 = 15 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ) and placed in a  
250 climatic chamber ( $T_a = 23 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ) (Figure 5c).



251

252 *Figure 4: Scheme of hot plate device; where  $T_1$  is the temperature of heating element,  $T_{01}$  and*  
 253  *$T_{02}$  are temperatures of the aluminum plates and  $T_a$  is the temperature of the air.*



254

255 *Figure 5: a) mold of sample preparation for centred hot plate tests b) compacted soil sample*  
 256 *for centred hot plate test c) test assembly C1) Manually Compressing screw (Tightening device)*  
 257 *C2) soil sample C3) reference material.*

258

### 259 3 Modelling

#### 260 3.1 The TFEM method

261 In this part, the inverse analytical model based on the one-dimensional solution of the Fourier  
262 heat balance equation is used to estimate the thermal diffusivity of the compacted soil based on  
263 the temperature variations between two temperature sensors.

264 The estimate of thermal diffusivity  $\alpha$  ( $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ ) is based on the estimation of the transfer  
265 function between the inlet and outlet temperatures inside the cylindrical sample. In this study,  
266 the heat flux is applied to the external surface of the cylindrical sample and as mentioned in the  
267 introduction, the transfer function is not dependent on the shape and intensity of the heat flux  
268 or the external boundary condition [32]. The following hypotheses are considered in this model:

- 269 - The initial temperature of the compacted soil inside the container is uniform;
- 270 - The heat transfer is 1D; and
- 271 - Mass transfer is neglected.

272 The inverse method is expressed by the following equations. The transient heat conduction in  
273 the radial direction in cylindrical coordinates is:

$$274 \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial r^2} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial T}{\partial r} = \frac{1}{\alpha} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} \quad (4)$$

275 With the following boundary conditions:

$$276 \left\{ \begin{array}{l} T(r, t = 0) = T_i, 0 \leq r \leq R \end{array} \right. \quad (5)$$

$$277 \left\{ \begin{array}{l} T(R, t) = T_0(t) \end{array} \right. \quad (6)$$

278 where  $T$  is the temperature (K),  $r$  is the radius (m) (the distance of the temperature sensors from  
279 the axis of the container),  $\alpha$  is the thermal diffusivity ( $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ ),  $t$  is the time (s),  $R$  is the radius  
280 of the container (m) and  $T_i$  is the initial temperature of the sample (K).

$$281 \text{The following applies:} \quad \bar{T} = T - T_i, \quad (7)$$

282 The Laplace transform of Eq. (4) results in Eq. (8), where  $p$  is the Laplace parameter ( $\text{s}^{-1}$ ),  
283  $\theta(r, p)$  is the Laplace transform of  $\bar{T}(t)$  and  $\alpha$  is the thermal diffusivity ( $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ ):

$$284 \frac{\partial^2 \theta}{\partial r^2} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial \theta}{\partial r} = \frac{p}{\alpha} \theta \quad (8)$$

285 This equation may also be written as:

286  $\frac{\partial^2 \theta}{\partial u^2} + \frac{1}{u} \frac{\partial \theta}{\partial u} = \theta$  with:  $u = \sqrt{\frac{p}{\alpha}} r = qr$  (9)

287 The general solution of this equation is [41]:

288  $\theta(r, p) = AI_0(qr) + BK_0(qr)$  (10)

289 where  $I_0$  is the modified Bessel function of the first kind of order 0,  $K_0$  is the modified Bessel  
290 function of the second kind of order 0, and A and B are constants.

291 The heat flux is null for  $r = 0$  so  $B = 0$  since  $\lim_{r \rightarrow 0} K_0(qr) = 0$ .

292 Hence:  $\theta(r, p) = AI_0(qr)$  (11)

293 The Laplace transform  $H_p$  of the transfer function  $F(t, \alpha)$  ( $s^{-1}$ ) between the two temperatures  
294  $\bar{T}(r_2)$  and  $\bar{T}(r_1)$  with  $r_2 > r_1$  is:

295  $H_p = \frac{\theta(r_2, p)}{\theta(r_1, p)} = \frac{I_0(qr_2)}{I_0(qr_1)}$  (12)

296 This function only depends on the thermal diffusivity.

297  $\theta(r_1, p) = \frac{I_0(qr_1)}{I_0(qr_2)} \theta(r_2, p)$  (13)

298  $\bar{T}(r_1, t) = \mathcal{L}^{-1} \left[ \frac{I_0(qr_1)}{I_0(qr_2)} \right] \otimes \bar{T}(r_2, t)$  (14)

299 where  $\otimes$  is the convolution operator.

300 The thermal diffusivity  $\alpha$  is estimated by minimizing the sum of the squared differences  
301 between the experimental curve  $\bar{T}(r_1)$  and the modelled curve calculated by the relationship of  
302 the following type:

303  $\bar{T}r_{1\_model} = \bar{T}r_{2\_experimental} \otimes F(t, \alpha)$  with:  $F(t, \alpha) = \mathcal{L}^{-1} [H(p, \alpha)]$  (15)

304 Minimization of the sum of the squared deviations is carried out with the Levenberg-Marquart  
305 algorithm, and the function  $F(t, \alpha)$  is calculated with the inverse Laplace transform of Eq. (12)  
306 and the De Hoog algorithm [42]. As indicated in Eqs. (14) and (15), this analytical model  
307 depends on the thermal diffusivity and the transient temperature variations at distances  $r_1$  and  
308  $r_2$  from the axis of the cylindrical sample. The temperature variations at different distances from  
309 the centre of the container were obtained from the experiments carried out in the laboratory.

### 310 3.2 Single-needle probe method

311 In this method, a heat flux is applied from a single stainless steel needle probe for a period of  
312 time,  $t_h$  (approximately 30 s), and then the cooling phase starts when the heat flux is stopped.  
313 For both the heating and cooling phases, the temperature variations are monitored every second.  
314 These temperature variations are then fit to the equations below [40].

315 The temperature during the heating phase:

$$316 T_h = m_0 + m_2 t + m_3 \ln t \quad (16)$$

317 The temperature during the cooling phase

$$318 T_c = m_1 + m_2 t + m_3 \ln \left[ \frac{t}{t-t_h} \right] \quad (17)$$

319 where  $T$  is the temperature (K),  $t$  is the time,  $m_0$  and  $m_1$  are the ambient temperatures of the  
320 heating and cooling phases (K), respectively,  $m_2$  is the rate of the background temperature drift  
321 ( $K \cdot s^{-1}$ ), and  $m_3$  is the slope of the line relating the temperature rise to the logarithm of the  
322 temperature (K). Since Eqs. (16) and (17) are log time approximations, only the final 2/3 of the  
323 data collected are used for fitting, and the early time data are neglected during the heating and  
324 cooling phases [38]. Finally, the thermal conductivity is calculated using the following  
325 equation:

$$326 \lambda = \frac{Q}{4\pi m_3} \quad (18)$$

327 where  $\lambda$  is the thermal conductivity ( $W \cdot m^{-1} \cdot K^{-1}$ ) and  $Q$  is the applied heat input rate per unit  
328 length ( $W \cdot m^{-1}$ ).

### 329 3.3 The centred hot plate method

330 The heat flux  $\varphi$  (W) produced in the heating element can be written as:

$$331 \varphi = \frac{\lambda_{ref}}{e_{ref}} (T_1 - T_{01}) + \frac{T_1 - T_{02}}{R_s} \quad (19)$$

332 where  $\lambda_{ref}$  and  $e_{ref}$  are the thermal conductivity ( $W \cdot m^{-1} \cdot K^{-1}$ ) and thickness (m), respectively,  
333 of the reference material,  $T_1$  is the temperature of the heating element (K),  $T_{01}$  and  $T_{02}$  are the  
334 temperatures of the aluminium plates (K) and  $R_s$  is the global thermal resistance ( $K \cdot m^2 \cdot W^{-1}$ ).

335 The global thermal resistance (sample and contact resistance) is given by:

$$336 R_s = \frac{T_1 - T_{02}}{\varphi - \frac{\lambda_{ref}}{e_{ref}} (T_1 - T_{01})} \quad (20)$$

337 and  $R_s = \frac{e_s}{\lambda_s} + R_{c1} + R_{c2}$  (21)

338 where  $R_{c1}$  and  $R_{c2}$  are the thermal contact resistances on each side of the sample ( $K \cdot m^2 \cdot W^{-1}$ ).

339 The thermal conductivity may be calculated as follows:

340  $\lambda_s = \frac{e_s}{R_s - R_{c1} - R_{c2}}$  (22)

341 Neglecting these thermal contact resistances, one can deduce the following:

342  $\lambda_s = \frac{e_s}{R_s}$  (23)

343 where  $\lambda_s$  is the soil thermal conductivity ( $W \cdot m^{-1} \cdot K^{-1}$ ) and  $e_s$  is the thickness of the soil  
344 sample (m).

#### 345 4 Results and discussion

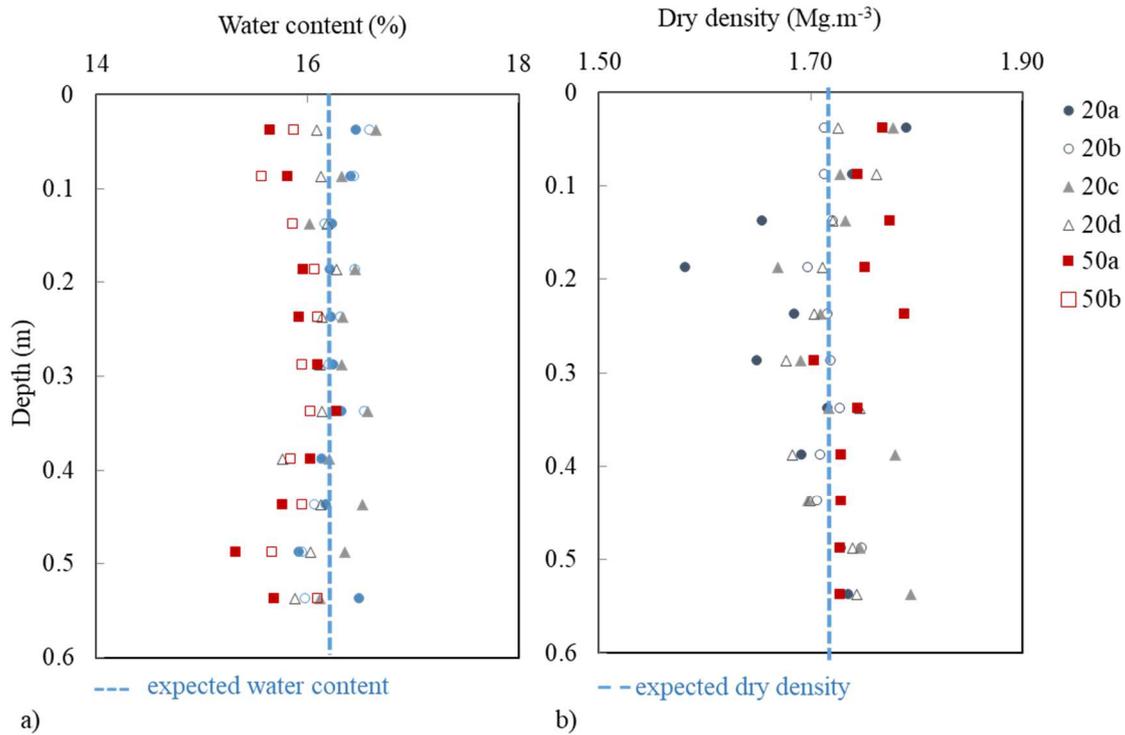
346 In the following, the homogeneity of the compacted soil is first verified, and then, the  
347 temperature monitoring data inside the compacted soil and the inverse analytical model were  
348 used to estimate the thermal diffusivity. Thereafter, the volumetric heat capacity of the material  
349 was measured via the micro-calorimeter test to estimate the thermal conductivity of the  
350 compacted soil.

##### 351 4.1 Water content and density profiles

352 The water content ( $w$ ) and dry density ( $\rho_d$ ) of the compacted soil were measured as a function  
353 of the depth (from 200 to 580 mm depth) in six cores (Figure 6). At the initial state (20a-b), the  
354 mean water content was 16.3%, and the mean dry density was  $1.72 \text{ Mg} \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$ .

355 The water content was measured before starting the thermal cycles (20a-b), and the values were  
356 close to the initial water content (16.3%) (Figure 6a). After the first heating cycle, there is a  
357 water content gradient in terms of the radius of the cylindrical samples, and the water content  
358 at the wall of the cylindrical sample near the heat flux decreased, while the water content at the  
359 centre of cylindrical sample increased (50a-b). Consequently, the water content measurement  
360 at a radius of  $R/2$  ( $R$  is the radius of the container) is slightly lower than the initial water content  
361 (-0.41%). At the end of the cycles, after the temperature has stabilized (20c-d Figure 3), the  
362 water gradient has dissipated, and the water content at a radius of  $R/2$  becomes equal to the  
363 initial value of 16.3%.

364



365

366 *Figure 6: (a) water content profiles (b) dry density profiles along the depth of the container.*

367 **4.2 Sensitivity analysis of the TFEM method**

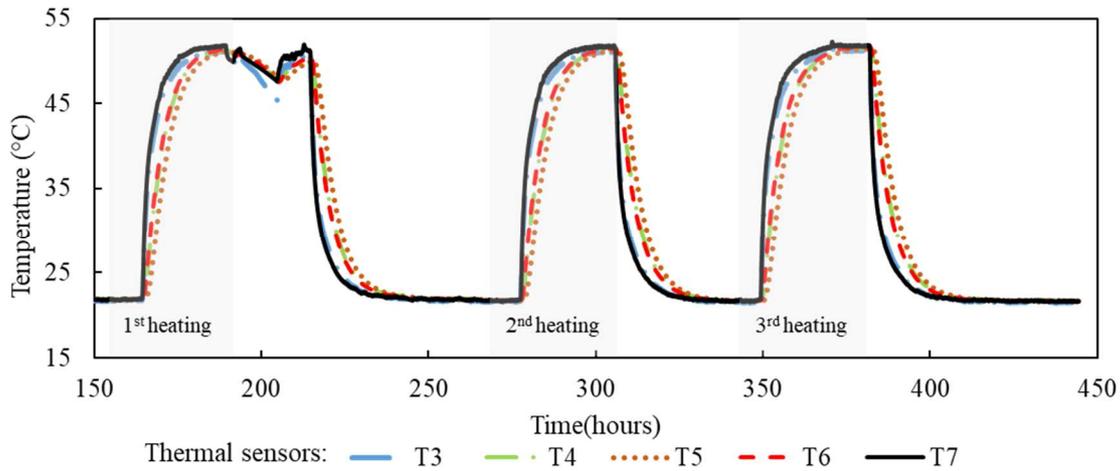
368 The initial temperature of the compacted soil was 20 °C, and the soil was subjected to three  
 369 heating cycles to 50 °C. The temperature variations were imposed through the outer lateral  
 370 surface of the container, and the temperature variations were recorded by the different  
 371 temperature sensors at the different positions in the container (see section 2.2 and Figure 3a for  
 372 further details). Figure 7 shows the temperature records of the temperature sensors T3, T4, T5,  
 373 T6, and T7. The time to reach equilibrium is different according to the distance between the  
 374 temperature sensor and the source of the heat flux. Thus, temperature sensors T7 and T3, which  
 375 were closer to the source, reached equilibrium quicker than the other temperature sensors that  
 376 were further away.

377 As mentioned in the previous section (3.1), the analytical model was based on the temperature,  
 378 the time, the thermal diffusivity and the distance from the centre of the container. First, the  
 379 uniqueness of the solution was verified, and then the standard deviation and the errors due to  
 380 the temperature and distance variations from the axis of the container were calculated.

381

382

383



384

385 *Figure 7 : Temperature variations in the compacted soil at various locations in the container:*  
 386 *three heating-cooling cycles (20-50-20 °C).*

387 4.2.1 Influence of the initial value of the thermal diffusivity

388 To verify the uniqueness of the solution, the analytical model was applied with several initial  
 389 thermal diffusivities. In Eq. (15), the temperature variations recorded by the T6 sensor were  
 390 used as  $Tr_2$  and the T5 values as  $Tr_1$ . The analytical model has been applied with different initial  
 391 thermal diffusivities ( $\alpha$ ) of  $5 \cdot 10^{-7}$ ,  $8 \cdot 10^{-7}$  and  $10 \cdot 10^{-7} \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ . For each test, the thermal  
 392 diffusivity converges towards the same value, namely,  $8.6 \cdot 10^{-7} \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ . The results showed  
 393 that the value of the estimated thermal diffusivity was independent of its initial value. In the  
 394 following, an average value of  $8 \cdot 10^{-7} \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  was considered as the initial value of the thermal  
 395 diffusivity.

396 4.2.2 Influence of the uncertainty of the temperature variations

397 To estimate the influence of the uncertainty of the temperature variations on the results, the  
 398 following process was performed:

399 - A random noise measurement with a standard deviation of  $\pm 0.1 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  was added to each  
 400 temperature measurement.

401 - The analytical model was applied considering these noisy temperatures.

402 This process was repeated 100 times for each sensor couple. The mean value and the standard  
 403 deviation were calculated for the first heating cycle (Table 1). The results showed that a  
 404 standard deviation of  $0.1 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  of the temperature values has a negligible standard deviation (less  
 405 than 0.05%) for the thermal diffusivity estimation.

406

407 *Table 1 : Standard deviation evaluation considering a 0.1°C error on the temperature measure*  
 408 *and errors due to the the variation of the distance (0.001 m) between the temperature sensors*  
 409 *from the axis of container.  $r_1$  and  $r_2$  are the distance of the sensors from the axis of the*  
 410 *container.*

Tr <sub>2</sub>	Tr <sub>1</sub>	r <sub>2</sub> m	r <sub>1</sub> m	$\alpha$ ( $10^{-7} \text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ )		standard deviation %	Error %
				Estimated	Mean		
T3	T4	0.25	0.15	10.08	10.08	0.05	2
T3	T5	0.25	0	10.24	10.24	0.03	1
T4	T5	0.15	0	10.49	10.49	0.03	2
T6	T5	0.15	0	8.68	8.68	0.04	1
T7	T5	0.25	0	9.21	9.21	0.02	0
T7	T6	0.25	0.15	9.52	9.52	0.04	1

411

#### 412 4.2.3 Influence of the distance variations on thermal diffusivity estimation

413 The main uncertainty of the model is related to the distances of the temperature sensors to the  
 414 centre of the container. In the laboratory, the relative positions of the temperature sensors inside  
 415 the container were accurately known, but in the field, the initial position of each temperature  
 416 sensor may change over time throughout their setting in the soil layer and throughout the length  
 417 of the structure. To estimate the influence of a distance error, the following process has been  
 418 carried out:

419 - Estimation of the thermal diffusivity with nominal values  $r_1$  and  $r_2$ .

420 - Estimation of the thermal diffusivity with the following pairs of radii ( $r_1 + \delta r, r_2 +$   
 421  $\delta r$ ), ( $r_1 + \delta r, r_2 - \delta r$ ), ( $r_1 - \delta r, r_2 + \delta r$ ), and ( $r_1 - \delta r, r_2 - \delta r$ ), where  $\delta r$  is the distance  
 422 error ( $10^{-3}$  m).

423 The maximum deviation between these 4 estimated thermal diffusivity values and the first one  
 424 has been considered as the estimated error. The process was applied to each pair of probes  
 425 (Table 1). The accuracy of the estimation of the thermal diffusivity is less than 2% for any pair  
 426 of temperature sensors.

427 It should be noted that an error as high as 10 mm in the position of temperature sensor T5 ( $r_1$   
 428 =0) would have a negligible influence on the estimated  $\alpha$  (a deviation less than 0.5%). This is

429 because  $I_0(r = 0) = 0$  and the derivative of  $I_0$  at the vicinity of 0 is small. In contrast, an error  
 430 of 5 mm in the position of temperature sensor T6 ( $r_2 = 0.15$  m) led to an error of 6.8%.  
 431 Consequently, the position of the temperature sensors must be accurately known to use this  
 432 method. In some cases, (such as for T6), the method could lead to a significant estimation error.

### 433 4.3 Thermal properties estimated with the TFEM

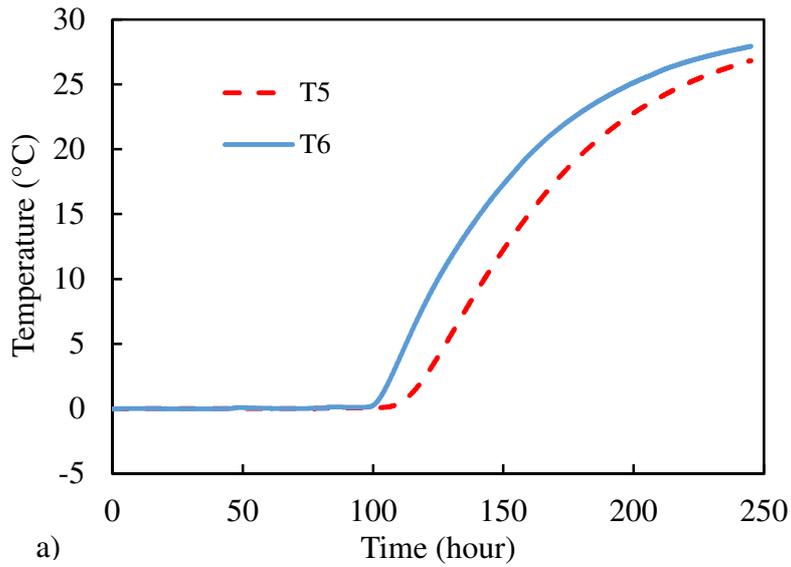
434 The thermal diffusivity value  $\alpha$  ( $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ ) for each section between 2 temperature sensors ( $\text{Tr}_2$   
 435 and  $\text{Tr}_1$ ) is listed in Table 2. The average thermal diffusivity was  $9.6 \times 10^{-7} \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  for the first  
 436 heating cycle and  $9.4 \times 10^{-7} \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  for the second and third heating cycles. Busby [43] estimates  
 437 the thermal properties of different types of soil by utilizing a British database of meteorological  
 438 soil temperature measurements obtained at a depth of 1 m. The range of the thermal diffusivity  
 439 values ( $5 \times 10^{-7} \leq \alpha \leq 10^{-6} \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ ) reported by Busby [43] was consistent with the thermal  
 440 diffusivity values determined in this study for soils with similar characteristics.

441 Figure 8a shows the difference recorded between the T5 and T6 measurements, and Figure 8b  
 442 compares the experimental records with the simulation results considering the estimated  
 443 parameters for the first cycle. The differences are much smaller than 0.02 °C for a maximum  
 444 temperature increase of 27 °C, which shows a good agreement between the experimental  
 445 measurements and the analytical model results and validates the applicability of the 1D heat  
 446 conduction model.

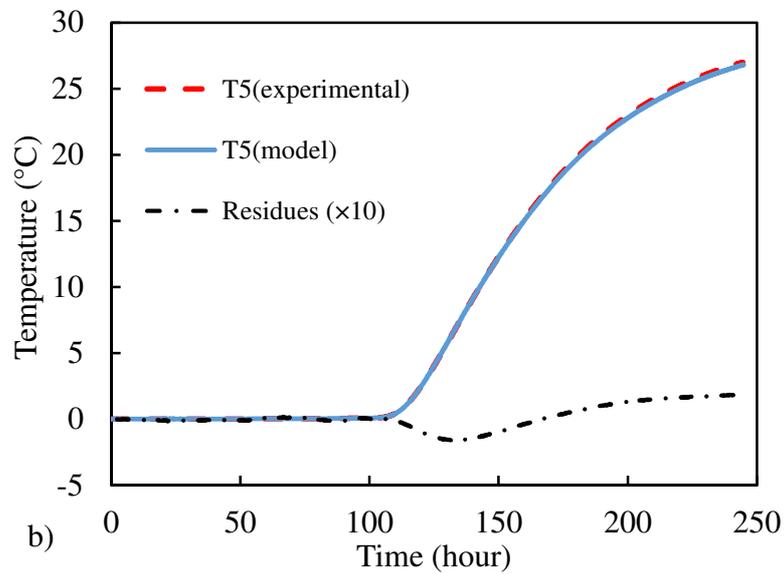
447 *Table 2: Estimated thermal diffusivity  $\alpha$  ( $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ ) of compacted soil using TFEM and thermal*  
 448 *conductivity  $\lambda$  ( $\text{W} \cdot \text{m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ ) using  $\alpha$  and  $C_v$  ( $\text{J} \cdot \text{m}^{-3} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ ) measured by calorimetry;  $r_1$  and*  
 449  *$r_2$  are the distance of the sensors from the axis of the container.*

$\text{Tr}_2$	$\text{Tr}_1$	$r_1$	$r_2$	$C_v$	1 <sup>st</sup> cycle		2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> cycles	
					$10^{-7}\alpha$	$\lambda$	$10^{-7}\alpha$	$\lambda$
		m	m	$\text{J} \cdot \text{m}^{-3} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$	$\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$	$\text{W} \cdot \text{m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$	$\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$	$\text{W} \cdot \text{m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$
T3	T4	0.25	0.15	$2.64 \times 10^6$	10.0	2.64	9.9	2.61
T3	T5	0.25	0		10.2	2.69	10.0	2.64
T4	T5	0.15	0		10.4	2.74	10.3	2.71
T6	T5	0.15	0		8.6	2.27	8.4	2.21
T7	T5	0.25	0		9.2	2.43	9.0	2.37
T7	T6	0.25	0.15		9.5	2.5	9.3	2.45

450



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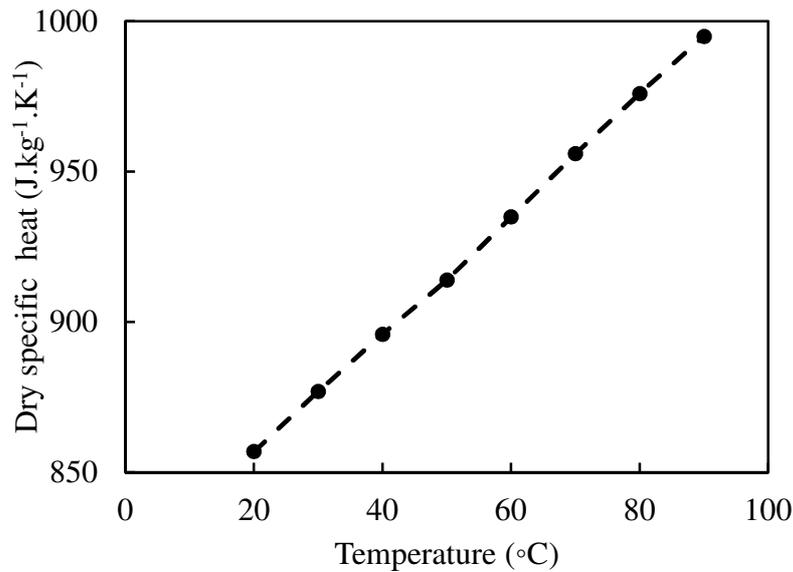
453 *Figure 8: a) temperature evolution recorded by T5 and T6 sensors during the first heating cycle*  
 454 *b) comparison between the experimental and the model values for T5 evolution.*

455 The dry specific heat,  $C_{dry}$ , of the dry material as a function of the temperature was measured  
 456 with a micro-calorimeter. The results are plotted in Figure 9. Then, considering the initial water  
 457 content (16.3%) of the tested samples, the specific heat,  $C_p$ , of the soil was calculated at 20 °C  
 458 using Eq. (2):  $C_p = 1322 \text{ J} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ . The volumetric heat capacity evaluated was finally  
 459 calculated with Eq. (3):  $C_v = 2.64 \times 10^6 \text{ J} \cdot \text{m}^{-3} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ .

460

461

462



463

464 *Figure 9: Dry specific heat variation ( $C_{dry}$ ) of the dried soil according to the temperature.*

465 Then, this value of the volumetric heat capacity ( $C_v = 2.64 \times 10^6 \text{ J.m}^{-3}.\text{K}^{-1}$ ) was used to  
 466 calculate the thermal conductivity  $\lambda$  ( $\text{W.m}^{-1}.\text{K}^{-1}$ ) for each cycle using Eq. (1). Table 2  
 467 summarizes the thermal conductivity values calculated for all cycles. The average value for the  
 468 first cycle was  $2.51 \pm 0.23 \text{ W.m}^{-1}.\text{K}^{-1}$ , and the average value for the second cycle was the  
 469 same as the third one:  $2.47 \pm 0.25 \text{ W.m}^{-1}.\text{K}^{-1}$ .

#### 470 4.4 Comparison with the other measurement methods

471 In this section, the results of the soil thermal conductivity measurements with the needle probe  
 472 (KD2 pro) and centred hot plate methods are presented. The thermal conductivity of the two  
 473 samples was measured with the needle-probe device (KD2 pro). The average thermal  
 474 conductivity of the samples was approximately  $2.46 \text{ W.m}^{-1}.\text{K}^{-1}$  (Table 3).

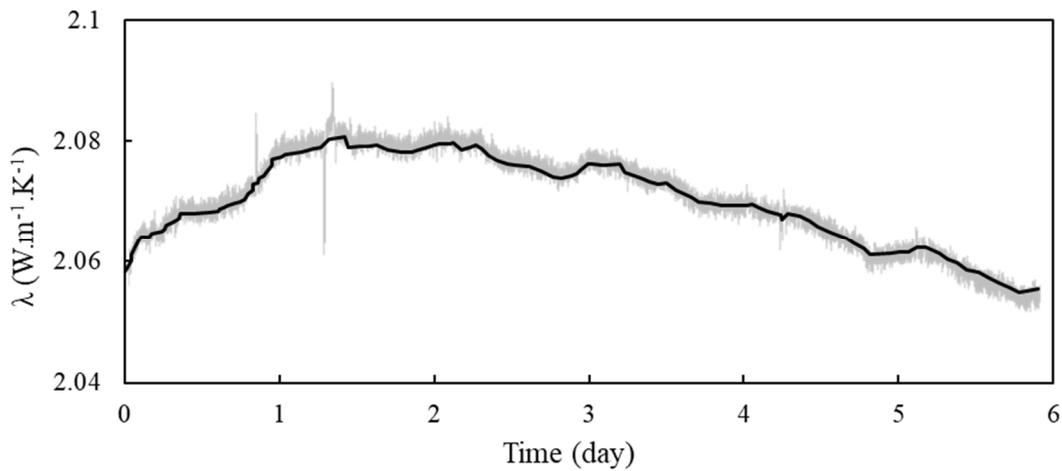
475 Two tests were performed with the centred hot plate method (Table 3). The first test lasted 2  
 476 days, and the second test lasted 6 days.  $T_1$  denotes the temperature of the heating element  
 477 controlled by the electrical intensity. During the tests, the temperature of the heating element  
 478 ( $T_1$ ) was  $24.3 \pm 0.76 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , and the temperature of the aluminium plates ( $T_{01}$  and  $T_{02}$ ) was  $14.5 \pm$   
 479  $0.5 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  (Table 3). The temperature differences between the heating element and the aluminium  
 480 plates induced a one-dimensional heat flow from the heating element through the sample  
 481 towards the aluminium plate. The temperature of the surrounding air in all the tests was kept  
 482 constant at  $23 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  to ensure 1D heat transfer at the centre of the sample. The variation of the  
 483 thermal conductivity with time for the second test is presented in Figure 10. After one day, the  
 484 thermal conductivity decreased. This decrease can be explained by considering the water

485 evaporation under heating, as the sample water content decreased from 16.3% to 14.66% during  
 486 the second test. Under that condition, the average thermal conductivity of the compacted soil  
 487 for both tests was  $1.97 \text{ W. m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ .

488 *Table 3. Thermal conductivity  $\lambda$  ( $\text{W. m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ ) Measurement of the compacted soil with the*  
 489 *single needle probe and centred hot plate method.*

Method	Single needle probe		Centred hot plate				
Nb.	T (°C)	$\lambda$ ( $\text{W. m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ )	e (m)	$T_1$	$T_{01}$	$T_{02}$	$\lambda$ ( $\text{W. m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ )
1	23.25	2.42	0.02	23.58	15.30	13.86	1.90
2	20.98	2.50	0.02	25.10	16.51	14.97	2.05
Mean value		2.46					1.97

490



491

492 *Figure 10 : Variation of the thermal conductivity  $\lambda$  ( $\text{W. m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ ) during a centred hot plate*  
 493 *test on the compacted soil.*

494 The estimated values of the thermal conductivity measured by the TFEM method  
 495 ( $2.51 \text{ W. m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ ) and by the single-needle probe method ( $2.46 \text{ W. m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ ) are very close  
 496 (2% deviation). In contrast, the deviation between the values obtained by the TFEM method  
 497 and the centred hot plate method ( $1.97 \text{ W. m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ ) is quite high (greater than 20%). The  
 498 thermal contact resistances that were neglected may explain this deviation. The thermal  
 499 resistance of the soil sample is approximately  $R_s = e_s / \lambda_s \approx 0.02 / 2.5 \approx 8 \times 10^{-3} \text{ K. m}^2 \cdot \text{W}^{-1}$   
 500 for a sample thickness of  $e = 0.02 \text{ m}$ .

501 Assuming an air layer with a thickness of  $e_{\text{air}} = 0.025 \text{ mm}$  on each side of the sample, the total  
 502 thermal contact resistance is  $R_{c1} + R_{c2} = 2e_{\text{air}} / \lambda_{\text{air}} = 2 \times 2.5 \times 10^{-5} / 0.025 = 2 \times 10^{-4}$

503  $\text{K} \cdot \text{m}^2 \cdot \text{W}^{-1}$ . The estimated value with Eq. (23) is  $\lambda_s = 1.97 \text{ W} \cdot \text{m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ . Considering the  
504 estimated value of  $R_{c1} + R_{c2}$  and using Eq. (22), one obtains:  $\lambda_s = 2.45 \text{ W} \cdot \text{m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ . This  
505 value is close to the values obtained with the two transient-state methods. One can conclude  
506 that steady-state methods are not suitable for the measurement of thermal conductivities as high  
507 as  $2.45 \text{ W} \cdot \text{m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ .

## 508 5 Conclusions

509 In this study, the thermal properties of an unsaturated compacted soil were investigated. The  
510 thermal diffusivity was estimated via a new “temperature/temperature” method based on the  
511 estimation of a heat transfer function. One of the main benefits of this method is that it only  
512 requires temperature time series measurements at two locations.

513 The thermal conductivity was then estimated based on the estimated values of the thermal  
514 diffusivity and the volumetric heat capacity measured by calorimetry and then compared with  
515 the values obtained with two other methods (a transient-state method and a steady-state  
516 method). The inverse analytical model, generally used to characterize granular powders, was  
517 applied to unsaturated compacted soils in this study. The results showed that this simple  
518 analytical model has a good agreement (2% deviation) with the experimental results obtained  
519 with the transient-state method and the single-needle probe method. In contrast, we have  
520 demonstrated that steady-state methods are not suited for this type of material since thermal  
521 contact resistances are no longer negligible compared to the sample thermal resistance.

522 In this method, the shape and intensity of the heat flux or the external boundary condition have  
523 not been considered, but the hypothesis of transient heat conduction in the radial direction in  
524 cylindrical coordinates should be considered. As is generally done, mass transfer is not  
525 considered in this model. The main uncertainty of the model is related to the distances of the  
526 temperature sensors to the centre of the container, so the distance between two sensors must be  
527 accurately measured.

528 The main advantage of this method is its application to in situ measurements. In this analytical  
529 model, heat conduction should be applied in the radial direction in cylindrical coordinates. The  
530 radial heat flux can be conducted experimentally, from the outer surface of a cylindrical  
531 container (as in this study), but under in situ conditions, the radial heat flux can be applied by  
532 just considering the cylindrical shape of heat exchanger loops (from the surface of the tubes  
533 towards an arbitrary cylindrical surface). In the field, only two temperature sensors should be  
534 placed at different distances from the heat exchanger tubes to monitor the temperature

535 variations; therefore, thermal properties at any time can be estimated. Consequently, this  
536 method could enable system efficiency estimation of possible future applications of thermal  
537 energy storage in compacted soils such as embankments or other configurations.

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## Nomenclature

### List of abbreviations

TFEM	Transfer function estimation method
THM	Thermo-hydro-mechanical
LL	Liquid limit
PL	Plastic limit
PI	Plasticity index
DSC	Micro differential scanning calorimeter
⊗	The convolution operator

### List of symbols

$C_p$	Specific heat ( $J \cdot kg^{-1} \cdot K^{-1}$ )
$C_{dry}$	Specific heat of dry material ( $J \cdot kg^{-1} \cdot K^{-1}$ )
$C_{water}$	Specific heat of pure water ( $J \cdot kg^{-1} \cdot K^{-1}$ )
$C_v$	Volumetric heat capacity ( $J \cdot m^{-3} \cdot K^{-1}$ )
$r$	Radius (m)
$R$	Radius of container (m)
$p$	Laplace parameter ( $s^{-1}$ )
$F$	Transfer function ( $s^{-1}$ )
$e$	Thickness (m)
$R_s$	Thermal resistance $K \cdot m^2 \cdot W^{-1}$
$R_{c1}$	Thermal contact resistances of sample and heating element $K \cdot m^2 \cdot W^{-1}$
$R_{c2}$	Thermal contact resistances of sample and aluminum plate $K \cdot m^2 \cdot W^{-1}$
$H$	Laplace transform of the transform function
$m_0$	Ambient temperature for heating (K)
$m_1$	Ambient temperature for cooling (K)
$m_2$	Rate of background temperature drift ( $K \cdot s^{-1}$ )
$m_3$	Slope of a line relating temperature rise to the logarithm of temperature (K)
$Q$	Applied heat input rate per unit length ( $W \cdot m^{-1}$ )
$t$	Time (s)
$T$	Temperature (K)
$T_h$	Temperature during heating phase (K)
$T_c$	Temperature during cooling phase (K)
$T_0$	Temperature of heating element (K)

$T_{01}$  Temperature of aluminum plate (K)

$T_{02}$  Temperature of aluminum plate (K)

List of Greek letters

$\lambda$  Thermal conductivity ( $\text{W} \cdot \text{m}^{-1} \cdot \text{K}^{-1}$ )

$\alpha$  Thermal diffusivity ( $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ )

$w$  Water content (%)

$\rho$  Density ( $\text{Mg} \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$ )

$\theta(p)$  Laplace transform of the temperature (K. s)

$\varphi$  Heat flux (W)

List of subscripts

in Inflow

i Initial

out Outflow

h Heating

air Air

s Soil

opt Optimum

d Dry

ref Reference material

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