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# Numerical Modeling of Pile Response in Soft Clay under Multidirectional and Cyclic Loading for Floating Wind Turbines

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## Abstract

Floating wind turbines offer a competitive advantage for harvesting renewable energy, particularly in locations with abundant wind resources. Among the critical components of these systems, anchoring and mooring systems are required to secure the wind turbines in place. Pile anchors are among the anchoring solutions currently available for floating wind turbines. Consequently, this study focuses on the behavior of pile anchors installed in soft clay subjected to cyclic loading, including multidirectional forces. To investigate this, a numerical model was developed via OpenSees and calibrated based on existing centrifuge test data. The results demonstrate that non-symmetrical cyclic loads induce the most significant accumulation of permanent pile displacements compared with two-way cyclic loading. Conversely, load reversals can contribute to a reduction in these displacements. Finally, the use of an axisymmetric anchor configuration appears beneficial for resisting complex loading patterns typical of floating wind turbines, as it can promote a more uniform mobilization of the pile's holding capacity.

**Keywords:** Offshore wind farms, multiline anchors, cyclic loading, clay

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## 1. Introduction

Offshore wind farms are rapidly expanding into deep water locations (>60 m depth) to access areas with high wind resources and mitigate impacts on the shoreline (Lee et al., 2020; Rezaei et al., 2023). This trend has driven the expansion of floating wind turbines (FOWTs) due to their flexibility in terms of size and reduced landscape impacts compared with fixed installations (OWTs) (Brussa et al., 2023). With this increased demand for FOWTs, various platform designs have been developed, categorized into four types: spar, barge, semi-submersible and tension leg platforms (Edwards et al., 2023). These developments necessitate the study of suitable mooring and anchoring systems for future FOWTs. The solutions, adapted from the oil and gas industry to the floating wind industry, encompass several types of anchors including driven piles, suction embedded plate anchors (SEPLAs), suction caissons, dynamically embedded plate anchors (DEPLAs), and drag embedded anchors (Aubeny, 2017; Cerfontaine et al., 2023).

A shared characteristic among all anchor types is the complex cyclic loads transferred from the wind turbine floaters via the mooring lines. These loads, characterized by a sustained component and interactions with wind, wave, and current components (WWC), can lead to significant anchor displacements and a reduction in soil shear strength due to soil structure breakdown (Andersen, 2015; Aubeny, 2017). This ongoing degradation can ultimately compromise the anchor's integrity and the overall stability of the floating wind unit (Hallowell et al., 2018).

Numerical and physical modeling have been used to study the behavior of offshore anchors under monotonic, cyclic, and multidirectional loading. Regarding numerical studies, Gogoi et al. (2023) investigated the performance of multiline ring anchors in sandy soils under monotonic loading conditions via 3D finite element modeling. Al-Janabi and Aubeny (2022) addressed the performance of piles and suction caissons subjected to cyclic loading to observe the accumulation of displacements of this type of anchors when installed in clayey soils. Kwa et al. (2023) developed anchor macroelement models that couple the anchor, mooring line and floater as a system. Cerfontaine et al. (2019) conducted a numerical study to determine the uplift resistance and identify the failure mechanisms of shallow plate and screw anchors. Yan et al. (2024) investigated the bearing capacity of shared anchors in sand under multidirectional loading, including factors such as the load angle and soil density. In terms of physical modelling research projects, Chung (2012) and Burns et al. (2014) conducted centrifuge tests to investigate the behavior of suction caissons installed in clay under inclined and cyclic orthogonal loads to simulate the arrival of two mooring lines (2-line) to a single anchor. Spicer et al. (2022) performed 1-g tests to study the performance of anchor piles in sand subjected to loads representative of tension leg platforms to integrate the framework of stability diagrams in the design of this type of anchors. Herduin (2019) investigated the behavior of pile and suction anchors in sand under multidirectional loading providing extensive datasets of displacements and rotations for 2-line and 3-line anchor configurations.

75           Despite these advancements, a gap remains in understanding the combined effects of different  
76 load characteristics (average and cyclic components, directionality) and complex loading scenarios  
77 (multidirectional) on pile response in soft clay. This study focuses on the response of piles in soft clay  
78 subjected to various load scenarios. For this purpose, a numerical modeling approach was developed in  
79 OpenSees software (McKenna et al., 2004) by incorporating the pressure-independent multiyield  
80 (PIMY) soil constitutive model. This model uses a nonlinear backbone curve and a multi-surface  
81 plasticity framework to simulate cyclic soil behavior. While the PIMY model captures stiffness  
82 degradation implicitly through hysteretic response and strain accumulation, it does not account for the  
83 cyclic degradation of the undrained shear strength or the onset of cyclic failure due to pore pressure  
84 buildup, as it follows a total stress formulation. Nevertheless, its relative simplicity and computational  
85 efficiency make it suitable for exploring general trends in displacement accumulation under  
86 multidirectional loading. The model performance was evaluated through comparisons with centrifuge  
87 test data involving monotonic and cyclic load scenarios.

88           Following the calibration of the numerical model, a parametric study was conducted to explore  
89 the influence of various load characteristics on the pile response. This study investigates the effects of  
90 average and cyclic load components (non-symmetric cyclic loading), load directionality (unidirectional  
91 and multidirectional), and varying load amplitudes. The multidirectional loading scenarios simulate the  
92 complex loads experienced by pile anchors in multiline systems (shared anchors). The findings of this  
93 study aim to shed light on the factors influencing the cyclic behavior of offshore piles in soft clay,  
94 particularly in terms of the development of cyclic and permanent displacements when loaded. Although  
95 this study does not focus primarily on load capacity, it provides a numerical modeling framework that  
96 describes cyclic displacements of piles in clay including complex load scenarios such as those that can  
97 be encountered in the application of the shared anchors concept for floating wind turbines.

98           This study addresses the limited understanding of pile anchor response in soft clay under realistic,  
99 multidirectional cyclic loading conditions relevant to FOWTs with shared anchors. The novelty lies in  
100 the application of time histories derived from representative wind, wave, and current conditions to  
101 simulate loading paths that extend beyond idealized cyclic patterns. A simplified numerical model is  
102 implemented in OpenSees, using a total stress formulation with known limitations, to capture key trends  
103 in cyclic displacement accumulation. A practical contribution of this work is the introduction of a  
104 procedure for applying load multipliers under multidirectional conditions, which can be adapted for use  
105 in other finite element software. While the approach is based on a simplified constitutive model, it  
106 provides a framework that can be extended for more advanced modeling and supports future studies  
107 involving more complex soil behavior and validation.

## 108           **2. Numerical Modeling Approach**

109           The numerical modeling approach in this study involved calibrating a pile model based on centrifuge  
110 experiments, followed by a series of parametric analyses.

## 2.1 Baseline model: SOLCYP centrifuge test

As a baseline for the calibration of the numerical models developed in this research, a set of centrifuge tests conducted at the Université Gustave Eiffel (formerly IFSTTAR) were utilized (Khemakhem et al., 2010; Khemakhem et al., 2012a; Khemakhem et al., 2012b). These tests, conducted under the framework of the SOLCYP project (Puech and Garnier, 2017), involved piles installed in kaolin clay and subjected to both monotonic loading and cyclic loading. The centrifuge experiments were performed at a centrifugal acceleration of  $n=50$  g. Figure 1 shows the geometric parameters of the pile, and Table 1 summarizes the model and prototype dimensions of the reference model and the scaling laws that link the behavior between the model and the prototype (Garnier et al., 2007). In these scaling laws, 'n' is the geometric scaling factor, which corresponds to the centrifugal acceleration level ( $n = 50$ ).

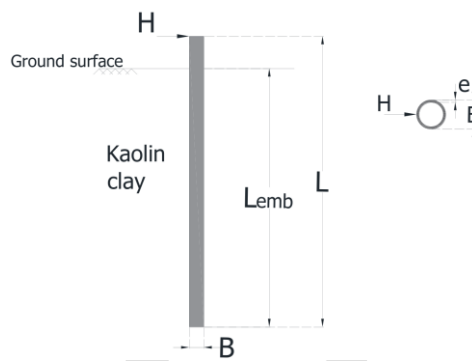


Fig.1. Pile geometry parameters

Table 1. Pile geometry parameters at the model and prototype scales

Parameter	Model dimensions	Scaling law model/prototype	Prototype dimensions
Length, L	360 mm	1/n	18 m
Embedded length, $L_{emb}$	320 mm	1/n	16 m
Diameter, B	18 mm	1/n	0.954 m*
Wall thickness, e	1 mm	1/n	40 mm**
Modulus of elasticity, $E_p$	74 GPa (aluminum)	1	74 GPa (aluminum)
Flexural rigidity, $E_p I_p$	—	—	895 MN·m <sup>2</sup>

\* The pile diameter was increased by 6% due to silicon resin to protect the pile instrumentation.

\*\* The pile wall thickness was adjusted to achieve the target flexural rigidity.

The model pile was installed at 1 g in a pre-bored hole with a smaller diameter. This installation method can be categorized as "wished-in-place". For the measurement of bending moments within the pile during the centrifuge experiments, a total of 21 levels of strain gauges were installed. To ensure waterproofing, the strain gauges on the instrumented piles were protected by a flexible silicone resin. This coating increased the external diameter of the pile by approximately 6%. Owing to the flexible nature of the resin, its contribution to the overall bending stiffness ( $E_p I_p$ ) of the pile was considered

133 negligible, and the calibrated stiffness of the base aluminum section was used for calculating the bending  
 134 moments. However, to correctly model the soil-pile interaction, all subsequent analyses, including the  
 135 derivation of p-y curves, were conducted using the effective external diameter of the coated pile (0.954  
 136 m at the prototype scale). Additionally, the wall thickness was adjusted to achieve a target flexural  
 137 rigidity for the prototype pile, equivalent to 895 MN·m<sup>2</sup> as reported by Khemakhem (2012a). The point  
 138 of application for the monotonic and cyclic loads was positioned at the pile head, located 2 m above  
 139 ground level.

140 To determine the behavior of the pile in terms of its relative stiffness to the soil (flexible, semi-  
 141 flexible, or rigid), the criterion of Poulos and Hull (1989) was employed. The pile-soil relative stiffness  
 142 was calculated as  $E_p I_p / E_s L_{emb}^4$ , where  $E_p$  is the pile Young's modulus,  $I_p$  is the pile moment of inertia,  
 143  $E_s$  is the soil Young's modulus and  $L_{emb}$  is the embedded length of the pile. This equation has upper  
 144 and lower boundary values of 0.0025 and 0.208, corresponding to flexible and rigid piles, respectively.  
 145 For simplicity,  $E_s$  was taken as the average Young's modulus over the upper half of the pile, where the  
 146 highest bending moments and shear stresses typically occur. Based on the provided information ( $E_p I_p =$   
 147  $895 MN \cdot m^2$ ,  $L_{emb} = 16 m$ ,  $E_s = 1.6 MPa$  as reported by Khemakhem, 2012a), the stiffness ratio  
 148 for the model was estimated to be 0.0085 classifying it as a semi-rigid pile.

## 149 2.2 Soil profile

150 The soil profile utilized for calibrating the numerical model comprised slightly overconsolidated kaolin  
 151 clay. The model preparation involved a reconstitution method, consisting of mixing dry Speswhite  
 152 kaolin clay powder with water to create a slurry with a water content of 90%. The basic physical and  
 153 mechanical properties of the Speswhite kaolin clay used are summarized in Table 2.

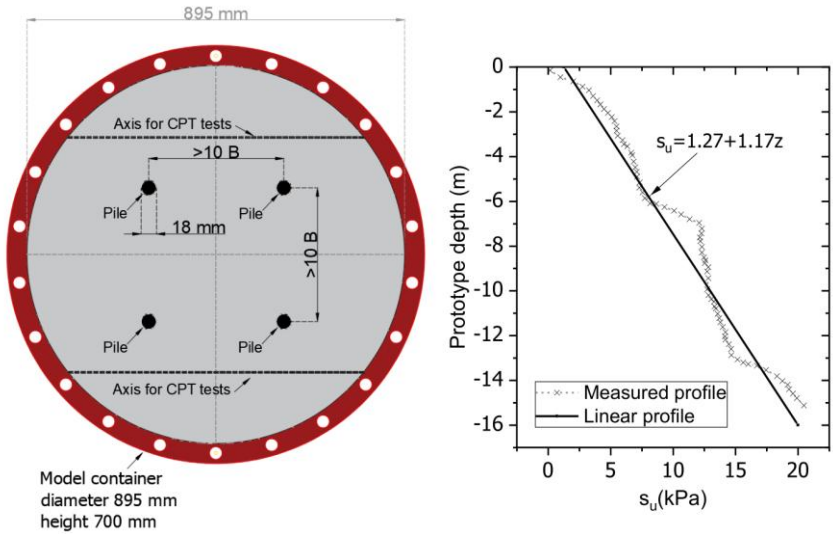
154 **Table 2.** Properties of Speswhite kaolin clay (Lau, 2015)

Property	Value
Plastic limit, PL (%)	30
Liquid limit, LL (%)	63
Plasticity index, PI (%)	33
Specific gravity, $G_s$	2.60
Slope of critical state line (CSL)	0.90
Slope of unload-reload line, $\kappa$	0.039
Intercept of CSL at mean effective stress $p'=1$ kPa, $\Gamma$	3.31
Slope of normal consolidation line, $\lambda$	0.22

155  
 156 The clay was then consolidated inside a cylindrical model container in three distinct sublayers, each  
 157 subjected to a sequence of consolidation pressures at 1 g via a hydraulic press. A subsequent phase of  
 158 consolidation occurred in the centrifuge at 50 g for 4 hours (at the model scale). Four piles were installed  
 159 in the model container and positioned to ensure a minimum spacing of 10 times the pile diameter

160 between them. In-flight cone penetration tests (CPTs) were conducted to determine the undrained shear  
 161 strength ( $s_u$ ) of the clay. For this study, the potential effects of strength anisotropy were not considered,  
 162 and the undrained shear strength derived from CPT tests was assumed to be isotropic. Figure 2 presents  
 163 the layout of one centrifuge experiment, showing the pile locations within the container, the axis along  
 164 which CPTs were performed, and the corresponding experimental and linear undrained shear strength  
 165 profiles. Based on the experimental results, Khemakhem (2012a) proposed an undrained shear strength  
 166 profile as a function of depth ( $z$ , in meters):

$$s_u = 1.27 + 1.17z \quad [kPa] \tag{1}$$



167  
 168 **Fig.2.** Slightly overconsolidated clay: Experimental layout and measured versus linear undrained shear strength  
 169 profiles (adapted from Khemakhem, 2012a)

170 **2.3 Finite-element Model Calibration**

171 The numerical model employed in this research was developed using OpenSees v3.5.0 (McKenna et al.,  
 172 2000). A 3D nonlinear model of the pile and the surrounding soil was constructed using 8-node brick  
 173 elements with reduced integration to improve computational performance and mitigate locking. The pile  
 174 was simulated by the '*elasticBeamColumn*' element type, characterized by its Young's modulus ( $E$ ),  
 175 moment of inertia ( $I$ ) and mass density( $\rho$ ).

176 The soil was modeled as a nonlinear hysteretic material utilizing a Von Mises multi-surface  
 177 kinematic plasticity model, designated '*PressureIndependentMultiYield*' (PIMY) (Yang et al., 2003).  
 178 The PIMY model is capable of simulating both monotonic and cyclic responses of materials, particularly  
 179 those with shear behavior insensitive to confinement changes, such as clay loaded under undrained  
 180 conditions. The model incorporates nested yield surfaces (denoted as  $f_1, f_M, \dots, f_{NYS}$  in the deviatoric  
 181 plane in Figure 3) to control the plastic modulus. This feature allows the model to be calibrated to a

182 predetermined stress-strain response, known as a backbone curve. This backbone curve, which defines  
 183 the nonlinear shear stress-strain relationship, is approximated by a hyperbolic function (Kondner, 1963):

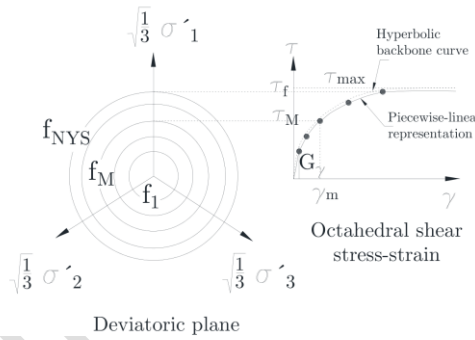
$$\tau = \frac{G\gamma}{1 + \gamma/\gamma_r} \quad (2)$$

184

185 where  $\tau$  and  $\gamma$  represent the octahedral shear stress and shear strain, respectively.  $G$  is the low-shear  
 186 strain modulus.  $\gamma_r$  is a reference shear strain defined as:

$$\gamma_r = \frac{\gamma_{max} * \tau_{max}}{G (\gamma_{max} - \tau_{max})} \quad (3)$$

187 where  $\tau_{max}$  refers to the shear strength achieved at large shear strains (i.e.,  $\tau_{max} \approx \tau$  at  $\gamma \rightarrow \infty$ ). The  
 188 PIMY material exhibits linear elastic behavior during the application of gravity loading. Under dynamic  
 189 conditions, the stress-strain response is governed by the multi-surface plasticity framework, where the  
 190 material follows an associative flow rule.



191

192 **Fig. 3.** Hyperbolic backbone curve for the nonlinear shear stress-strain response in multisurface  
 193 plasticity (Prevost, 1985)

194 The PIMY model is a total-stress, pressure-independent formulation that does not incorporate  
 195 explicit mechanisms for the cyclic degradation of shear strength or stiffness. Instead, cyclic behavior  
 196 arises implicitly from the multi-surface plasticity framework and the shape of the hyperbolic backbone  
 197 curve. The accumulation of permanent strain during cyclic loading—commonly referred to as  
 198 ratcheting—is not controlled by direct input parameters but emerges from the implementation of a Mroz-  
 199 type kinematic hardening rule (Mroz, 1967; Prevost, 1985). While this approach captures cyclic  
 200 hysteresis and stiffness reduction to some extent, the model does not simulate the progressive loss of  
 201 strength typically associated with excess pore pressure buildup or structural degradation in cohesive  
 202 soils. The yield surface remains fixed and does not evolve with accumulated cycles, limiting the model's  
 203 ability to reproduce cyclic softening or failure mechanisms. These limitations are inherent to the  
 204 constitutive formulation; more advanced models, such as bounding surface plasticity or effective stress-  
 205 based formulations, would be required to capture such phenomena.

206 The PIMY material requires the definition of five parameters to represent the clay behavior  
 207 under cyclic loading: i) mass density, ii) pressure dependence coefficient, iii) cohesion or undrained  
 208 shear strength ( $s_u$ ), iv) rigidity index ( $G_{max}/s_u$ ), and v) Poisson's ratio ( $\nu$ ). The mass density of the clay  
 209 was defined as  $1.8 \text{ Mg/m}^3$ . This value corresponds to typical values for Speswhite kaolin clay and is  
 210 consistent with those reported in previous numerical modeling studies (Soriano et al., 2024). The  
 211 undrained shear strength ( $s_u$ ) was defined as a depth-dependent profile as defined in Equation 1. The  
 212 rigidity index ( $G_{max}/s_u$ ) controls the shape of the hyperbolic backbone curve and was calibrated to match  
 213 the experimental load–displacement response. For this model, a value of  $G_{max}/s_u = 350$ , where  $G_{max}$   
 214 corresponds to the shear stiffness at small strains, was found to provide the best agreement with the  
 215 monotonic pile head displacements observed in the centrifuge tests. This ratio reflects the small-strain  
 216 shear modulus relative to the undrained strength and is used to define the initial tangent stiffness of the  
 217 soil. The selected value is within the range reported in the literature for soft marine clays: for example,  
 218 Feng et al. (2019) used  $G_{max}/s_u = 336$  in suction caisson analyses, Lai et al. (2021) adopted a range of  
 219  $G_{max}/s_u$  from 250 to 1000 for monopile models, and Fu et al. (2020a) employed a value of  $G_{max}/s_u = 333$   
 220 in layered clay profiles.

221 For the current model, the number of yield surfaces was set to 20 to adequately represent the soil  
 222 behavior under varying load conditions. In the PIMY soil model, the Von Mises yield surface can be  
 223 calibrated to fit  $s_u$  by adjusting the yield stress in the model to correspond to the undrained strength of  
 224 the soil. In the current analysis,  $s_u$  was assumed to be isotropic. This simplification, although common  
 225 in numerical modeling, may not capture the anisotropic behavior observed in  $K_0$  consolidated triaxial  
 226 tests. Table 3 summarizes the parameters employed for the definition of the pile and soil materials.

227 **Table 3.** Model calibration parameters

<b>Pile</b>	
E	74 GPa
EI	895 MN•m <sup>2</sup>
Mass density, $\rho$	2.71 Mg/m <sup>3</sup>
<b>Clay</b>	
Mass density	1.8 Mg/m <sup>3</sup>
Pressure dependence coefficient	0
Cohesion - $s_u$ (without strain rate effects)	1.27+1.17z (kPa)*
Rigidity index $G_{max}/s_u$	350
Poisson's Ratio - $\nu$	0.49

228 \*Depth z in meters (m)

## 229 2.4 Finite Element Mesh

230 The finite element mesh was designed with a boundary distance from the pile's edge to the mesh's far  
 231 end set at 20 times the pile diameter (20D), equivalent to approximately 20 meters. Vertically, the extent  
 232 of the mesh was determined to be twice the pile's embedment length (2L), for a total depth of 32 meters.

233 At the bottom boundary, all three displacement components were fixed (zero displacement).  
234 Additionally, normal displacements were fixed at the vertical boundaries.

235 The pile was modeled as a volume; to consider the hollow section characteristics of the pile,  
236 reduction factors were applied to the gross section to obtain an equivalent area of cross-section and  
237 moment of inertia. The numerical model did not account for the effects of pile installation; however, as  
238 previously discussed, the model preparation technique for the centrifuge test resembled a "wished-in-  
239 place" pile installation.

240 The undrained shear strength ( $s_u$ ) profile defined in Equation (1) was discretized into sub-layers  
241 with a thickness of 1 m to capture the increase in  $s_u$  with depth. This approach is similar to that employed  
242 by Soriano et al. (2024) for simulating the behavior of soft clay submarine slope profiles subjected to  
243 seismic loading. A scale factor was applied to the undrained shear strength profile presented in Equation  
244 1 to consider strain rate effects as discussed in the following section. For the numerical simulations, no  
245 gap was assumed along the pile. This assumption is justified on basis of the analysis by Fu et al. (2020b),  
246 who showed that for normally consolidated clays with low undrained shear strength near the seabed, the  
247 development of a tension gap behind the pile has a limited impact. This is because the loss of passive  
248 resistance at the rear is offset by an increase in the effective earth pressure on the front of the pile.  
249 Therefore, for the depth-dependent strength profile considered in this study, the influence of a potential  
250 gap is expected to be minimal.

251 To achieve an acceptable level of mesh refinement while maintaining computational efficiency,  
252 a mesh convergence study was performed. The final mesh consisted of 36,080 elements and 37845 nodes  
253 for the soil domain and 3,996 elements and 3,997 nodes for the pile. The configuration of this finite  
254 element mesh, along with the normalized stress-strain response of the clay (normalized backbone curve),  
255 is illustrated in Figure 4.

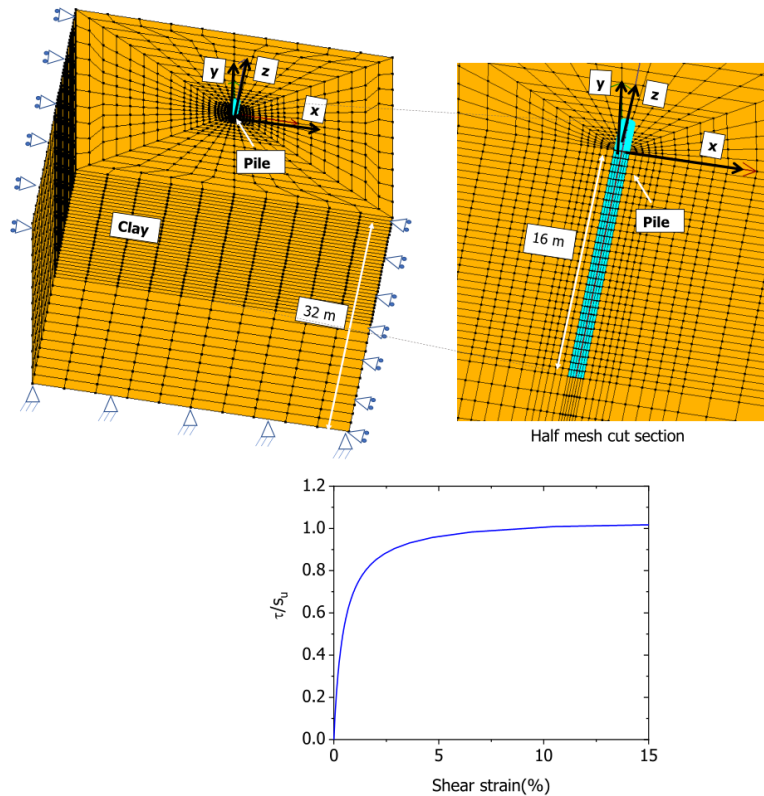


Fig.4. Three-dimensional finite element mesh and backbone curve

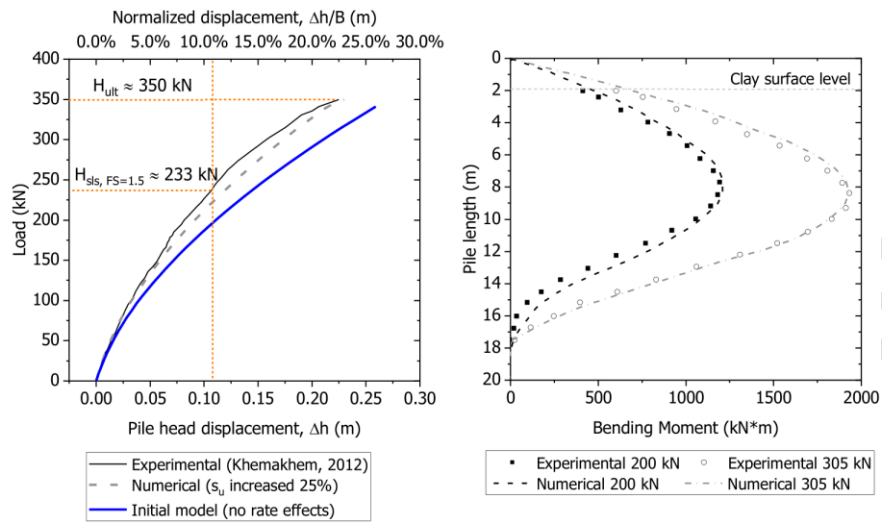
### 3. Numerical Model Calibration

#### 3.1 Monotonic response

The validation of the numerical model was conducted by comparing its monotonic response to that of the centrifuge test SOLCYPC05S1ins, as reported by Khemakhem (2012a). In the centrifuge test, the pile was loaded in a displacement-controlled manner at a rate of 20 mm/s (prototype scale). This means that a displacement of 100 mm (or approximately 0.1D) was reached in about 5 seconds, which is significantly faster than standard monotonic DSS tests and has implications for strain rate effects (Andersen, 2015). An initial model was run using the undrained shear strength profile from Equation (1), which resulted in an overprediction of the pile head displacement, as depicted in Figure 5.

On the basis of the back-analyses conducted by Zhang et al. (2020), the  $s_u$  profile was increased by 25% to account for these rate effects. The adjusted model demonstrated an improved match when compared with the experimental pile head displacements. With the model now considering strain rate effects, additional comparisons were conducted in terms of bending moments observed at two distinct levels of pile loading, as shown in Figure 5. The analyses were conducted at the prototype scale, using the geometric parameters provided in Table 1. From this point forward, the analyses and results presented in this paper consider the adjusted undrained shear strength profile.

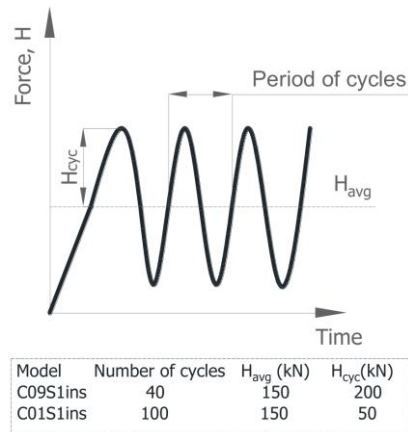
274 The monotonic test revealed an ultimate load ( $H_{ult}$ ) of approximately 350 kN. Furthermore, by  
 275 applying a safety factor of 1.5, a serviceability state load ( $H_{SLS}$ ) of 233 kN was obtained, corresponding  
 276 to a normalized displacement of approximately 11% of the pile diameter ( $\Delta h/B$ ).



277  
 278 **Fig.5.** Comparison of monotonic load response: experimental data versus numerical model results for pile head  
 279 displacement and bending moments

### 280 3.2 Cyclic response

281 To evaluate the cyclic response of the numerical model, two centrifuge tests from Khemakhem  
 282 (2012a) were selected: test C09S1ins and test C01S1ins. In both experiments, the load was applied  
 283 at the pile head. The load was maintained at an average level of  $H_{avg}=150$  kN, while the cyclic  
 284 component was varied. During the centrifuge experiment, an initial load was applied at a rate of 50  
 285 kN/s until the average load level ( $H_{avg}$ ) was reached, followed by the cyclic load amplitude ( $H_{cyc}$ ).  
 286 The load cycles were subsequently applied at a rate of 0.25 Hz. Figure 6 illustrates the cyclic load  
 287 definitions employed in the centrifuge tests and numerical models. Specifically, for the test  
 288 identified as C09S1ins, 40 load cycles were applied with a cyclic amplitude of  $H_{cyc}=200$  kN,  
 289 resulting in load reversals applied to the pile. For test C02S1ins, 1000 cycles were applied with a  
 290 cyclic amplitude of 50 kN.



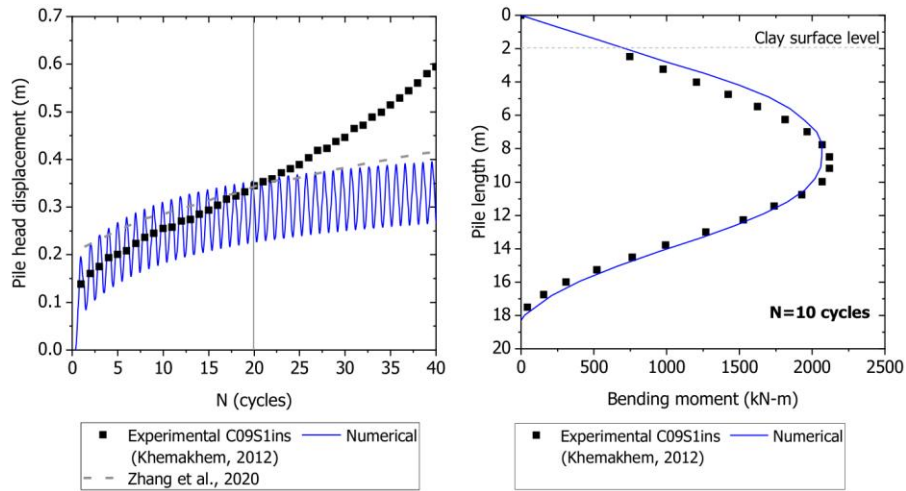
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292

**Fig.6.** Cyclic load definitions

293 Figure 7 and Figure 8 present the outcomes of the cyclic load models, focusing on the comparison of  
 294 accumulated pile displacements versus the number of cycles and the bending moment profiles at a given  
 295 number of cycles. The results are also compared with those of the back-analyses conducted by Zhang et  
 296 al. (2020).

297 The results show that for the large-amplitude cyclic load test (C09S1ins in Figure 7), the  
 298 numerical model follows the accumulation of pile head displacements up to approximately 20 load  
 299 cycles ( $N=20$ ). This trend aligns with the numerical model of Zhang et al. (2020), which exhibits a  
 300 similar response. However, Khemakhem (2012a) reported an abrupt increase in the rate of cyclic  
 301 displacement accumulation beyond 20 cycles in the C09S1ins experiment, suggesting large soil  
 302 plastification. This divergence is attributed to the PIMY model's formulation. As a total stress-based  
 303 model, it does not explicitly calculate the accumulation of pore water pressure. Instead, the effects of  
 304 phenomena such as pore pressure build-up and clay destructuration are implicitly included by calibrating  
 305 the model against the accumulated displacements from the cyclic tests. The abrupt increase in the  
 306 experimental displacement rate after 20 cycles is likely due to significant pore pressure accumulation,  
 307 leading to a reduction in cyclic the stiffness and strength, an effect that the current model does not  
 308 capture.



309

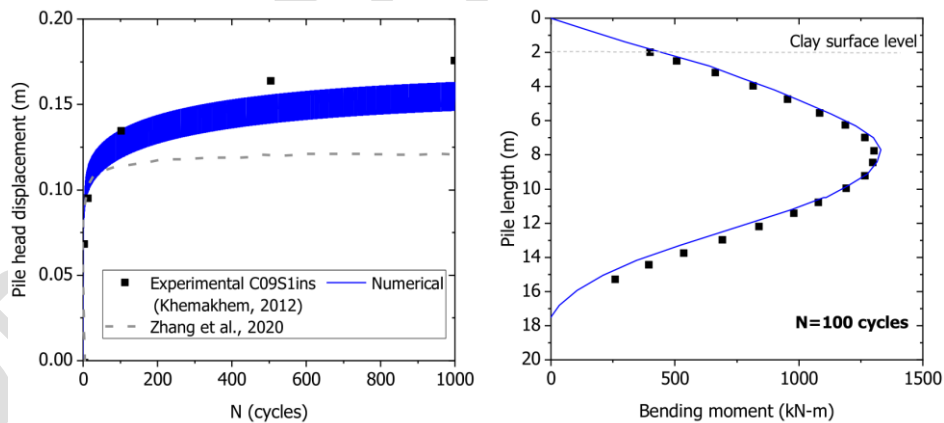
310

**Fig. 7.** Cyclic load model response compared with experimental data for test C09S1ins ( $H_{cyc}=200$  kN)

311

For the low-amplitude model (C01S1ins in Figure 8), the numerical model closely follows the trend observed in the reference test, even at relatively large numbers of load cycles. However, it slightly underestimates the accumulated displacements. Moreover, the back-analysis curve of Zhang et al. (2020) underpredicted the experimental data. In terms of bending moments, for the load cycles selected for comparison, the numerical model was able to follow the test measurements for the low and large amplitude loading conditions.

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**Fig. 8.** Cyclic load model response compared with experimental data for test C01S1ins ( $H_{cyc}=50$  kN)

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#### 4. Parametric study

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To evaluate the performance of the numerical model under various loading conditions, a parametric study was conducted. The baseline for this study was established using the soil profile and pile geometry from the model calibration. The study involved applying cyclic loads in different scenarios:

324

- Unidirectional cyclic loading with variations in both average and cyclic load amplitudes.

325 - Multidirectional loading.

326 The primary objective was to assess how the model responds to various combinations of average  
327 and cyclic loads. This also served to evaluate the capabilities of the modelling approach proposed  
328 in this research. For the peak load in the models, a safety factor (FS) of 1.5 was applied to the  
329 ultimate load ( $H_{ult} = 350$  kN) obtained from the monotonic model to simulate an operational load  
330 condition.

331 For the estimation of multidirectional loads on the anchor pile, a purely horizontal load condition  
332 was assumed. This simplification is representative of a catenary mooring line configuration, where  
333 the inherent weight of the line ensures that a segment rests on the seabed, resulting in a load that is  
334 effectively horizontal at the anchor padeye. This assumption is consistent with recent studies on  
335 shared anchor systems for floating offshore wind turbines (Fontana et al., 2018; Lovera et al., 2025;  
336 Zabatta et al., 2025). A summary of the load scenarios used in the numerical simulations is provided  
337 in Table 4.

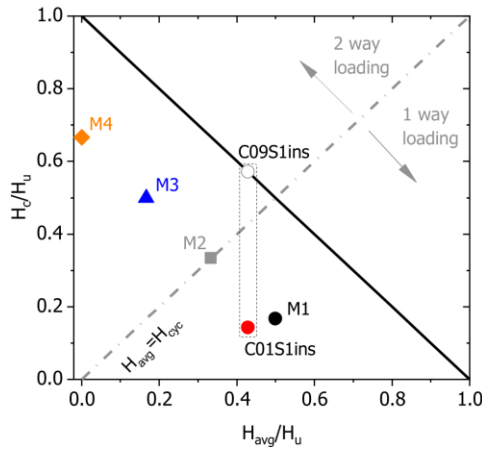
338 **Table 4.** List of numerical models for parametric analyses

Model	$H_{ult}$ (kN)	FS	$H_{max}$ (kN)	$H_{avg}$ (kN)	$H_{cyc}$ (kN)	N(cycles)
M1	350	1.5	233.3	116.7	116.7	100
M2	350	1.5	233.3	175.0	58.3	100
M3	350	1.5	233.3	58.3	175.0	100
M4	350	1.5	233.3	0.0	233.0	100
M5		Variable amplitude load - increasing amplitude				1228
M6		Variable amplitude load - decreasing amplitude				1228
DLC 1.6 WWC 0°		Multidirectional load - three mooring lines				
DLC 1.6 WWC 30°		Multidirectional load - three mooring lines				
DLC 1.6 WWC 60°		Multidirectional load - three mooring lines				

339

340 Figure 9 presents an interaction diagram summarizing the load configurations of models M1 to M4.  
341 This diagram utilizes normalized values for the average load component ( $H_{avg}/H_{ult}$ ) and the cyclic  
342 load component ( $H_{cyc}/H_{ult}$ ), where  $H_{ult}$  is the ultimate load. The load cases from the validation models  
343 C09S1ins and C01S1ins are also included for comparison.

344 The interaction diagram reveals that the large load amplitude scenario from test C09S1ins falls  
345 within the boundary that delimits unstable behavior under cyclic loading. This aligns with the  
346 observed experimental response in Figure 7, where a significant increase in cyclic displacements  
347 occurs after 20 cycles.



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**Fig. 9.** Interaction diagram for the pile model showing unidirectional load cases M1-M4 and validation tests

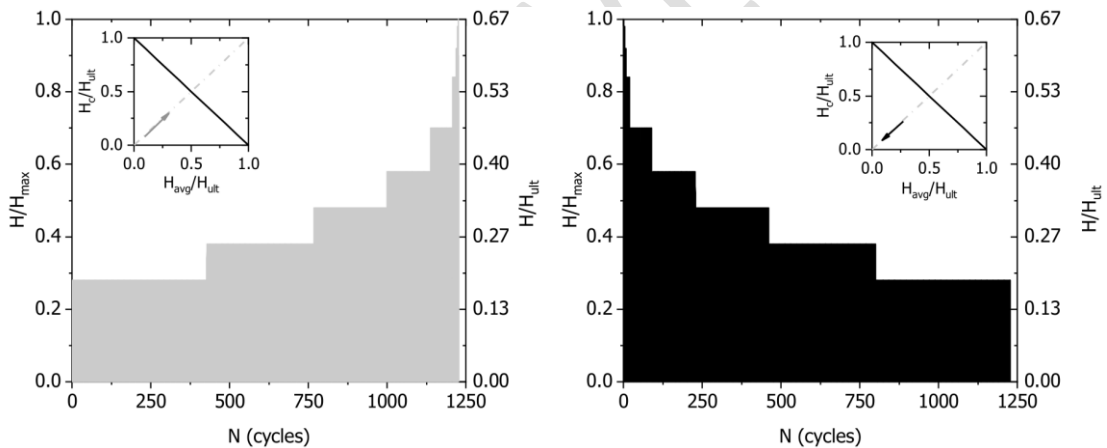
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Figure 10 illustrates the load compositions applied to model M5 and model M6 along with a representation of the trajectories followed within the interaction diagram. These compositions (number of cycles at different constant cyclic load amplitudes) were based on the conceptual transformation of a design storm into load parcels presented by Andersen (2015).



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**Fig. 10.** Variable-amplitude load sequence based on the load parcel concept (Andersen, 2015)

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## 5. Results

358

### 5.1 Effects of Cyclic and Average Load

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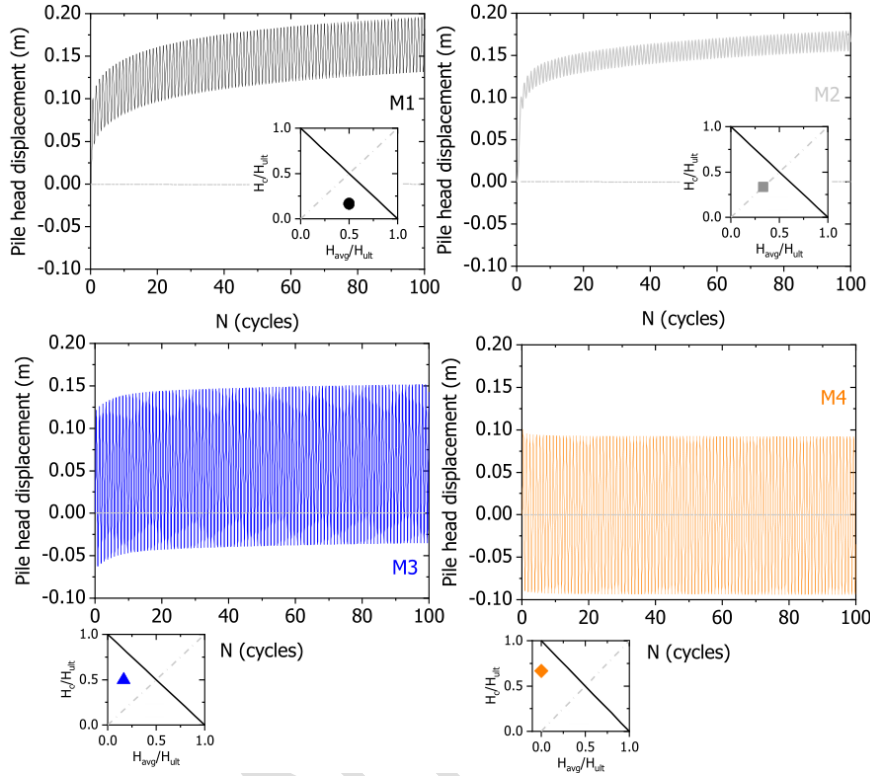
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Figure 11 shows the displacement histories in relation to the number of cycles applied to models M1 to M4. These models were subjected to the same peak load, with varying combinations of average and cyclic loads. Model M2, which had a high average load ( $H_{avg} = 175$  kN) and a low cyclic amplitude ( $H_{cyc} = 58.3$  kN), resulted in the greatest accumulation of permanent displacements. This reflects the influence of the sustained average load in driving long-term pile head displacements, even when the cyclic component is smaller. In contrast, model M1, with equal average and cyclic loads ( $H_{avg} = H_{cyc} = 116.7$  kN), showed smaller permanent displacements than M2 but larger cyclic amplitudes due to the

366 greater load variation. Model M3, dominated by the cyclic component ( $H_{cyc} = 175$  kN), exhibited larger  
 367 displacement amplitudes but less permanent accumulation compared to M2. Models M3 and M4  
 368 introduced load reversals, with model M4 having the largest reversal. These reversals appear to stabilize  
 369 the response and reduce the net accumulation of displacements over cycles.



370

371 **Fig. 11.** Pile head displacements with increasing number of load cycles: models M1 to M4

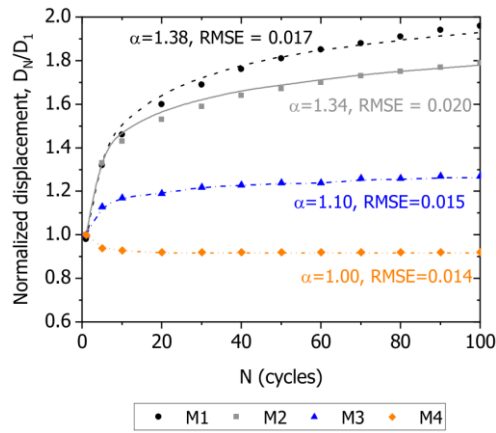
372 To examine the accumulation of displacements, the peak displacement for each cycle ( $D_N$ ) was  
 373 normalized by the peak displacement at the first loading cycle ( $D_1$ ). Figure 12 provides a summary of  
 374 the normalized displacements ( $D_N/D_1$ ) as the number of loading cycles increases. The normalized  
 375 displacements were fitted using a logarithmic function (Lin and Liao, 1999):

$$\frac{D_N}{D_1} = 1 + \alpha \ln(N) \quad (4)$$

376

377 where  $\alpha$  is an attenuation parameter related with the pile head displacement as the number of  
 378 cycles ( $N$ ) increases. The curves shown in Figure 12 include the calculation of the root mean square  
 379 error (RMSE) ranging from values of normalized displacement of 0.014 to 0.020. The results indicate  
 380 that the normalized displacements exhibit the highest values when the average and cyclic loads are equal  
 381 (model M1). Model M2 presents a similar trend to that of model M1, with slightly lower values of  
 382 normalized displacement accumulation. Finally, the models incorporating load reversals (M3 and M4)  
 383 display a stabilization of the normalized displacements as the number of cycles increases. Although the

384 numerical simulations here refer to piles subjected to lateral cyclic loading, the load reversal condition  
385 can be associated with multiline anchors (Fontana et al., 2018), and the results provide insights into the  
386 stabilizing effects on displacement accumulation when load reversals occur in piles installed in soft clay.



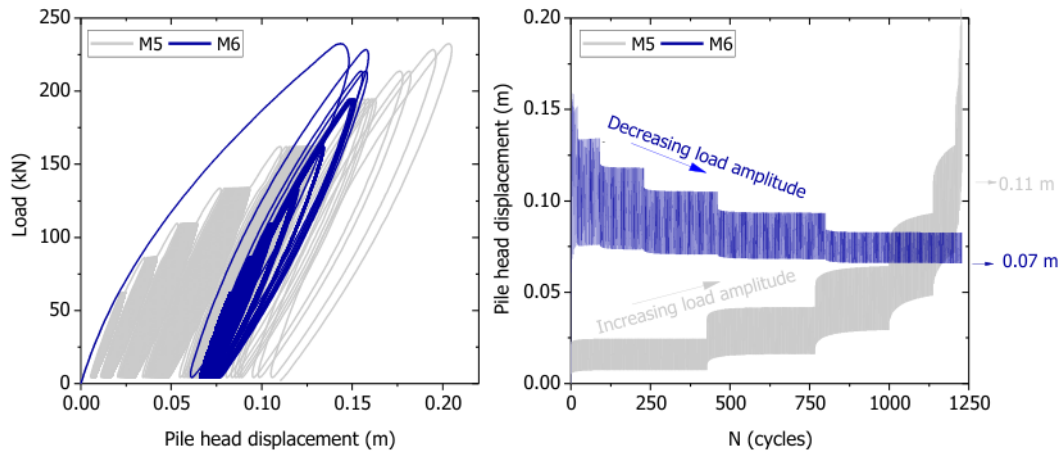
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388 **Fig. 12.** Normalized displacements versus number of cycles for models M1 to M4, with logarithmic  
389 curve fits.

## 390 5.2 Varying Amplitude Loads

391 Figure 13 shows the load-displacement curves obtained from the application of the variable amplitude  
392 load sequences depicted in Figure 10. The objective was to evaluate the model's performance under a  
393 high number of cycles (>1000 cycles) using a well-established load history employed in offshore  
394 foundation applications. The results exhibit a distinct response depending on the order of the application  
395 of the loading packages.

396 In the case of the decreasing load amplitude sequence (model M6), there is an initial generation  
397 of large peak and permanent displacements. This is subsequently followed by a decrease in both peak  
398 and permanent components. Upon the completion of 1250 cycles, the increasing amplitude load  
399 sequence (model M5) resulted in larger permanent displacements of around 11 cm. This contrasts with  
400 the reducing amplitude load sequence, which yielded permanent displacements of approximately 7 cm  
401 (model M6). This difference can be attributed to the cumulative damage caused by the larger load  
402 amplitudes applied later in the loading sequence for Model M5, leading to more pronounced plastic  
403 deformation in the soil surrounding the pile. Similar behavior has been observed in numerical models  
404 of caissons in clay subjected to cyclic loading under total stress assumptions (Al-Ramthan and Aubeny,  
405 2020; Al-Janabi and Aubeny, 2022). It is worth noting, however, that effective stress-based models may  
406 capture a different response, where early high-amplitude loading generates excess pore pressures and  
407 stress redistribution, potentially leading to greater displacement accumulation under subsequent smaller  
408 cycles.



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**Fig. 13.** Variable amplitude load response: increasing load packages (M5) and decreasing loading packages (M6)

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### 5.3 Multidirectional Load

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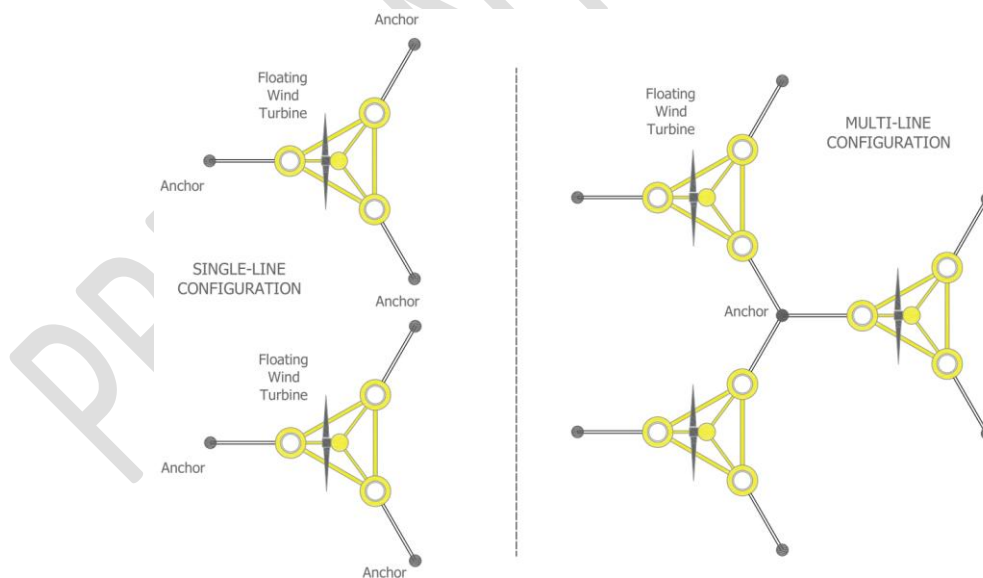
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To replicate the complex loading conditions experienced by offshore anchoring systems, a multidirectional load configuration was incorporated into the model. This configuration simulates the convergence of three mooring lines at the pile head, replicating the multiline anchor concept increasingly employed in floating wind farm deployments such as Hywind Tampen, WindFloat and Hybrid Spar (Fontana et al., 2018). Figure 14 illustrates a schematic comparison of single and multiline anchor geometries.



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**Fig. 14.** Representation of single line and multiline anchor configurations for floating wind turbines

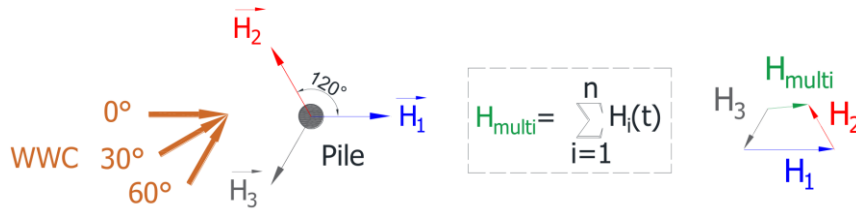
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The load set for the multiline anchor configuration was derived from the calculations presented by Balakrishnan et al., (2020) for a multiline anchor configuration employing the NREL 5 MW with OC3 spar-buoy supported turbines (Jonkman, 2010). Figure 15 depicts an idealized configuration with three

424 mooring lines converging at a single pile, with 120-degree angular separation between each line. The  
 425 tension forces for each wind turbine are denoted as  $\vec{H}_1$ ,  $\vec{H}_2$ , and  $\vec{H}_3$ , while  $\vec{H}_{multi}$  represents the  
 426 resultant force, or combined force acting on the pile due to the shared anchor system. The individual  
 427 mooring line tensions were converted into the resultant force  $\vec{H}_{multi}$  using vector summation.



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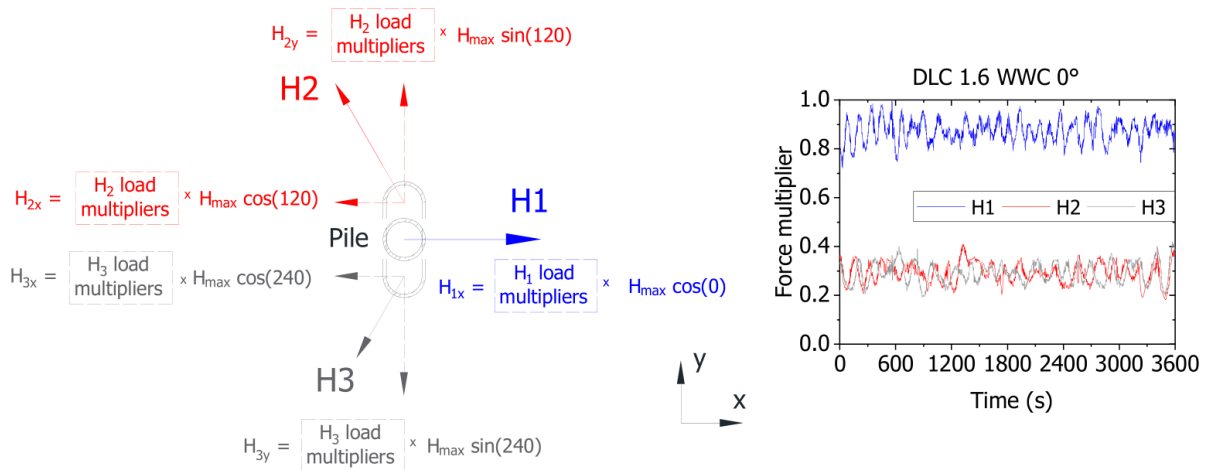
**Fig. 15.** Forces acting in a three mooring line configuration

430 Three load cases (DLC 1.6 WWC 0°, DLC WWC 30°, and DLC WWC 60°) were selected to represent  
 431 varying wind, wave, and current (WWC) orientations ranging from 0° to 60°. These load sets were  
 432 adapted from the work of Balakrishnan et al. (2020) to be compatible with the current numerical model  
 433 through a two-step normalization and scaling procedure.

434 First, normalization was performed independently for each load case, using the peak forces of relevant  
 435 load components (H1 for DLC 1.6 WWC 0° and DLC WWC 30°, and H2 for DLC WWC 60°) as  
 436 normalization factors. This process yields dimensionless load multipliers ranging from 0 to 1, a common  
 437 approach in nonlinear finite element analyses that allows for the preservation of realistic load patterns  
 438 while enabling flexible scaling for various structural capacities (Smith, 2009). The normalized  
 439 multipliers thus maintain the relative contributions of the wind, wave, and current effects on each  
 440 mooring line.

441 Second, the load multipliers were scaled by a reference peak load ( $H_{max}$ ) of 233 kN for each relevant  
 442 load component. This reference load was determined from the maximum pile load recorded during  
 443 centrifuge testing ( $H_{ult} = 350$  kN), which was reduced by a safety factor of 1.5. This scaling method  
 444 aligns with strategies applied in similar numerical studies (Al-Ramthan et al., 2020) and corresponds to  
 445 a load that produces a pile head displacement of approximately 10% of the pile diameter—a common  
 446 serviceability limit state (CFMS, 2020).

447 This combined normalization and scaling procedure ensures that the applied loads remain within  
 448 realistic bounds while preserving the relative load contributions and temporal characteristics of the  
 449 original dataset. Figure 16 illustrates the distribution of scaled load multipliers on the pile head in both  
 450 horizontal (x) and transverse (y) directions for the DLC 1.6 WWC 0° load case.



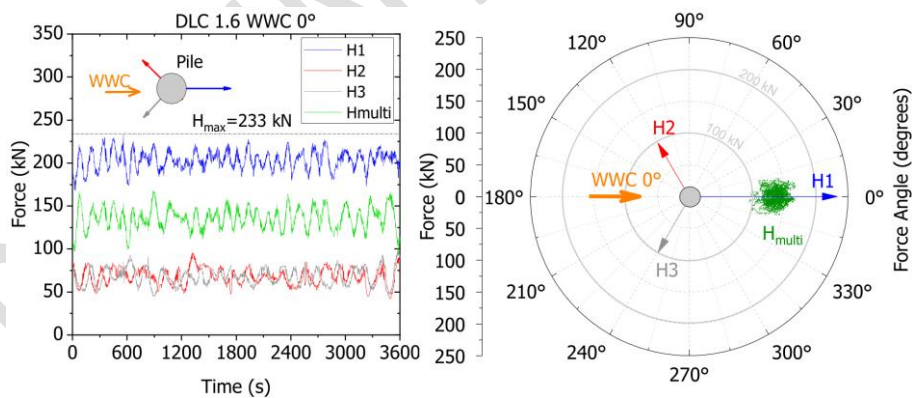
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**Fig. 16.** Representation of the application of load multipliers to the model

453 The scaled time histories and polar plot representations of the multidirectional forces ( $H_{multi}$ ) applied to  
 454 the numerical model are presented in Figure 17, Figure 18, and Figure 19. For the DLC 1.6 WWC  $0^\circ$   
 455 and DLC 1.6 WWC  $30^\circ$  load cases, the resultant forces closely follow the WWC directions, indicating a  
 456 dominant influence from these aligned components. In contrast, the DLC 1.6 WWC  $60^\circ$  case exhibits a  
 457 resultant force aligning more closely with the orientation of the predominant load component,  $H_2$ , at an  
 458 average angle of  $120$  degrees. This behavior can be attributed to the shift in the peak loads toward  $H_2$ ,  
 459 combined with the relatively similar magnitudes of  $H_1$  and  $H_3$ .

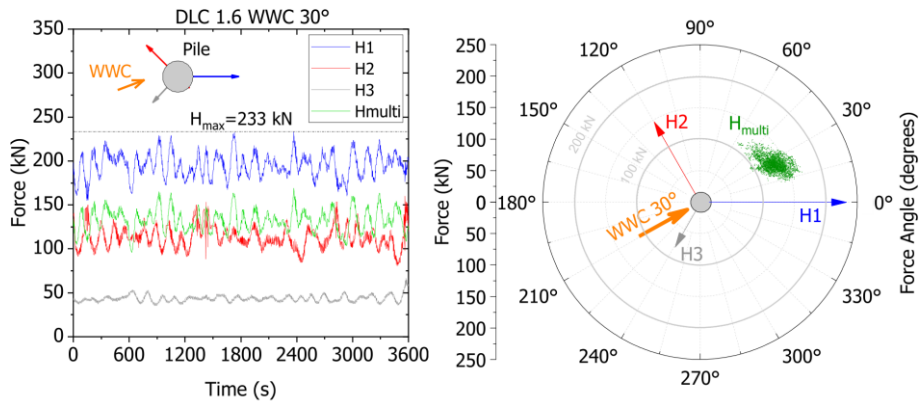
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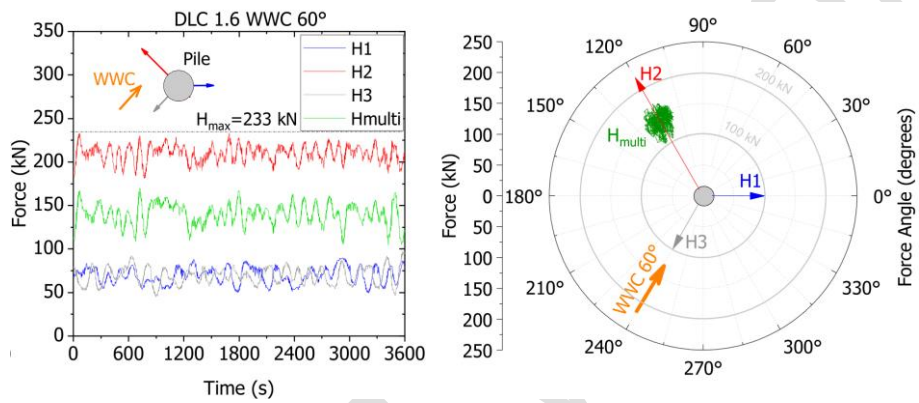
**Fig. 17.** Scaled time histories of forces applied to the pile model, with a WWC of  $0^\circ$



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**Fig. 18.** Scaled time histories of forces applied to the pile model, with a WWC of 30°



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466

**Fig. 19.** Scaled time histories of forces applied to the pile model, with a WWC of 60°

467 Figure 20 summarizes the pile head displacements observed in the numerical model for the different  
 468 load cases. As expected, the displacements increase from zero due to the application of the average load  
 469 component acting in the direction of the resultant force ( $H_{multi}$ ). Table 5 shows that for load cases DLC  
 470 1.6 WWC 0° and DLC 1.6 WWC 30°, the mean angle of the resultant displacements aligns with the  
 471 WWC directions. For the DLC 1.6 WWC 60° load case, the observed shift in resultant displacements  
 472 corresponds to the previously discussed dominance of the  $H_2$  load component.

473 Once the average load value is reached, the displacement accumulation patterns are influenced  
 474 by the specific components of the multidirectional load. Notably, Table 5 reveals similar resultant and  
 475 peak displacement magnitudes across all three cases. This behavior supports the suitability of  
 476 axisymmetric anchors, such as piles or suction caissons, for shared anchor systems.

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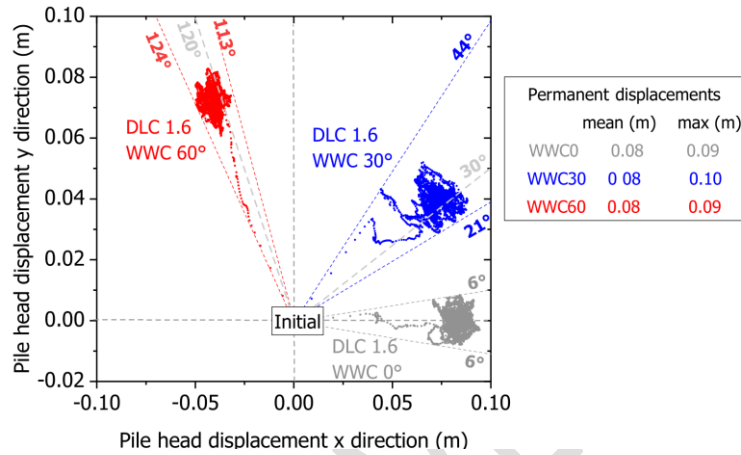
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**Table 5.** Summary of multidirectional displacements

Load Case	Resultant displacements		Angle		
	Mean (m)	Max(m)	Min (deg)	Mean (deg)	Max(deg)
DLC 1.6 WWC 0°	0.08	0.09	-6	0	6
DLC 1.6 WWC 30°	0.08	0.1	21	28	44
DLC 1.6 WWC 60°	0.08	0.09	113	120	124

482



483

**Fig. 20.** Multidirectional displacements for load cases DLC 1.6 WWC0°, DLC 1.6 WWC30°and DLC 1.6 WWC60°

484

485

## 486 6. Discussion

487 While the numerical model shows good agreement with centrifuge test data for monotonic and  
 488 unidirectional cyclic loading, its application to multidirectional scenarios (e.g., DLC 1.6 WWC  
 489 0°/30°/60°) lacks direct validation against physical test data for piles in clay. This is largely due to the  
 490 limited experimental data in the literature concerning the performance of piles in cohesive soils under  
 491 such complex loading. Recent relevant research includes observations from tests on shared anchor piles  
 492 in sand subjected to multidirectional loading (Abadie, 2025). Furthermore, the development of new  
 493 experimental capabilities, such as a setup for testing multidirectional loads on suction anchors in  
 494 normally consolidated kaolin clay has been reported by Soriano et al. (2025).

495 In the current study, multidirectional effects are indirectly captured through the superposition of load  
 496 vectors and the inherent plastic response of the soil model. However, the constitutive model does not  
 497 include specific features to represent directional soil fabric or anisotropic degradation, and its limitations  
 498 in this context are recognized. Therefore, the numerical predictions presented here should be interpreted  
 499 as a foundational step toward modeling shared anchors under multidirectional loading. Future validation  
 500 work is planned to support and refine this approach as new experimental data become available.

501

## 502        **7. Conclusions**

503        The numerical model developed in this study provides valuable insights into the cyclic response of  
504        offshore piles in soft clay. The model captured the primary trends of displacement accumulation  
505        observed in the centrifuge tests, showing good agreement with the experimental response for initial  
506        loading cycles and low-amplitude scenarios. While the proposed approach is a valuable tool for  
507        assessing pile performance, its limitations, such as not capturing the abrupt increase in the rate of  
508        displacement accumulation observed experimentally after a higher number of cycles, are acknowledged.

509                A primary contribution of this research is the development and application of a methodology to  
510        analyze pile anchors under the complex, multidirectional loading characteristic of shared anchor  
511        systems. Faced with a scarcity of established procedures and publicly available load datasets, this study  
512        introduces a practical workflow for scaling and applying such loads.

513                The parametric study highlighted the influence of various cyclic load combinations on the pile  
514        response. The scenarios with a high sustained average load component (models M1 and M2) are the  
515        primary drivers of permanent displacement accumulation. In contrast, the introduction of load reversals  
516        (Models M3 and M4) was shown to counteract this one-directional accumulation, resulting in reduced  
517        net permanent displacements over the applied cyclic loading histories.

518                The investigation of different wind, wave, and current (WWC) orientations ( $0^\circ$ ,  $30^\circ$ , and  $60^\circ$ )  
519        highlighted the influence of load component dominance on the resultant forces. A key finding was that  
520        the resultant and peak displacements remained similar across all tested WWC orientations. This  
521        consistent performance, irrespective of the primary load direction, supports the suitability of an  
522        axisymmetric pile configuration for complex applications such as shared anchor systems, where load  
523        directionality can vary significantly.

524                This study adopted a simplified assumption of homogeneous soil properties; however, natural  
525        clay deposits and even reconstituted centrifuge models may exhibit spatial variability. Such variability,  
526        characterized by vertical and horizontal correlation lengths (Phoon and Kulhawy, 1999), may influence  
527        the development of displacements, bending moments, and failure mechanisms. Although the use of  
528        uniform soil parameters facilitates the interpretation of the model response and improves computational  
529        efficiency, future studies should incorporate spatial variability to assess its influence on local and global  
530        pile behavior under multidirectional cyclic loading.

531                Finally, the study has certain limitations stemming from the chosen constitutive model. The  
532        'PressureIndependentMultiYield' (PIMY) model is a total-stress formulation and does not explicitly  
533        account for history-dependent phenomena such as pore pressure accumulation or the associated  
534        degradation of soil strength and stiffness. While the model implicitly captures permanent strain  
535        accumulation through kinematic hardening, this behavior is an emergent property rather than a directly

536 controlled parameter. Further validation with field data from instrumented piles under real-world  
537 loading conditions would strengthen the model's generalizability.

## 538 **Acknowledgements**

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540 programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement: 101106921 - Project ShareWind.

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