DEFORMABILITY AND SHEAR STRENGTH PARAMETERS OF THE FOUNDATION OF A PROJECT ON TANJERO FORMATION IN IRAQ USING RMR AND GSI

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ABSTRACT

Determination of the shear strength and deformability parameters of weak rocks are very significant in order to design the foundation of buildings on it economically and safely. Tanjero formation consists of an alternation of sandstone and silty marlstone and it is considered as a weak rock layer which makes it difficult to determine precisely its bearing capacity. Understanding the behavior of this formation under loading is one of the most challenges in geotechnical engineering. The formation underlies most of the areas in Sulaimani city and significant projects such as Shari Daik and Barzayakni Sulaimni projects in Sulaimani city in Iraq. In this paper, the mentioned parameters of this formation were predicted and recommended for the foundation of a multi-story building at Shari Daik project in Sulaimani city in Iraq based on Rock Mass Rating (RMR) and Geological Strength Index (GSI) rock systems.

KEYWORDS: Weak rock; GSI; Rock Mass; RMR; Shear strength parameters and Deformability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the engineering properties and bearing capacity of weak rocks is a challenge to geotechnical engineers and geologists (Ahmed and Jamin, 2018; Ioanna et al., 2009). Weak rocks often form a great portion of the shallow stratum all over the world especially in Sulaimani region in Iraq. Since the foundation of many construction projects are built on weak rock, it is crucial to investigate the geotechnical properties of weak rocks such as Tanjero formation in Iraq. Tanjero formation consists of alternation of thin layers of sandstone and silty marlstone (Buday, 1980). The rock formation at Shari Daik project at the foundation of building A10 was chosen as a case study which is located in Sulaimani city, especially at the Dabashan District opposite the Chavi land park. Figure 1 shows the site plan of the project.

The project is a multi-story building (23 stories) and is constructed as a reinforced concrete frame building.

This paper includes the results of geotechnical investigation for the foundation of the project so as to estimate the shear strength parameters and modulus of deformation using both rock classification systems: Rock Mass Rating (RMR) by Bieniawski, (1989) and Geological Strength Index (GSI) by Hoek (2002). The field work includes the rock mass investigation by taking rock cores from the foundation of the project and field study for measuring the orientation of joint sets of the rock mass under the building. In addition, it includes the results of laboratory testing, subsurface exploration, assessment of test results and Conclusions.
2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Field Work

The preliminary soil investigation was carried out by digging two boreholes. The Boreholes have been drilled to depth of 3m and it was difficult to get core rock samples because the marl layer was breakable and thin (layers thickness almost less than 10 cm). Therefore, prism rock samples of size (5cm x 5cm x10cm) were taken from the rock blocks of the outcrop during excavation of foundation. Figure 1 displays the site plan of the proposed project area with locations of the boreholes. The rotary drilling machine was used to dig the boreholes. It should be noted that the thickness of Tanjero formation at the study area is more than 500m (Karim and Surdashy, 2006).

Fig. (1): Site plan of the project
The foundation of the building is weak bed rock which consists of alternation of layers of marl and cemented sandstone. This bedrock is known as Tanjero Formation. Generally, there are a bedding layer and two joint sets. The dips and the dip directions of the planes are summarized in Table 1. Also, the planes are presented in Figure 2. The stereonet was drawn using software GeoRose by Yong Technology Inc (2020).

**Table (1):** Dips and dip directions of the rock planes at Foundation of A10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planes</th>
<th>Strike</th>
<th>Dip direction</th>
<th>Dip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bedding</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>25±2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint set1</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>65±3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint set2</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>65±3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Fig. (2): Equal area equatorial stereonet.](image)

**2.2 Recovery of Rock Samples**

Rock samples from un-weathered part of the foundation of the proposed building were generally obtained from the outcrops of the Tanjero formation at appropriate locations at the foundation level of the building. Six rock samples of size (5cm x 5cm x10cm) were obtained from both layers: Sandstone and marlstone.

**2.3 Plate Load Test**

The estimation of the modulus of subgrade reaction (ks) with allowable capacity of soils in situ of a foundation can be well estimated from the field load test. This test is usually referred to as the Plate Load Test. The test was done according to ASTM-1997 D1194. The plates are usually made of steel and are 150 mm to 762 mm in diameter and 25 mm thick (Das, 2007). In this work, the plate of a diameter of 300 mm which is manufactured by InfraTest Prüftechnik GmbH was chosen to conduct the test. The Plate Bearing Test Set 160 kN comprising:

- measuring beam with single-gauge, made of Aluminium tubes with adjustable supports
- Plate size of Diameter of 300 mm with measuring tunnel.
- Set of pluggable extension rods.
- Upper ball and socket joint
- Hydraulic system 160 kN comprising piston. Th maximum pressure is about 1.1 MPa.
- The settlement is measured with a measuring bridge with gauge holder. Only one Dial gauge of 30 mm is used in this set

The plate size of 300mm was selected because the foundation of building A10 consists of thin layers of marlstone with sandstone which makes it reliable to use it. Figure 3 shows the plate load test which was performed in the field at depth of 2.0m from the lowest ground level in the front of building No. A10 at Shari Daik project. The excavator weight was used as a loading platform.
To conduct a test on a plate of diameter of 300 mm, it should be placed at the depth of the proposed foundation. The plate was loaded in 10 steps by means of a hydraulic jack. The maximum capacity of the load cell was about 1100 kPa. The settlement of the plate was measured for each load increment using the dial gauge. In this study, two points were tested. The tested locations were at the foundation center.

The first point was tested under dry condition, whereas the second point was tested under saturated condition. Figure 4 displays the load settlement curve obtained from the tests, from which $k_s$ is determined. The $k_s$ was about 956938 kPa/m and 495050 kPa/m for dry and saturated condition, respectively. This indicates that the value of $k_s$ has been affected by saturation.

Fig. (3): Plate load test in the field
The value of subgrade reaction modulus is variable for a given soil and it depends on several factors, such as the length (L), width (B) of the foundation and the depth of foundation. “A comprehensive study by Terzaghi (1955) of the parameters affecting the coefficient of subgrade reaction indicated that the value of the coefficient decreases with the width of the foundation” (reported by Das, 2007). The value of $k_s$ is related to large square footing using Eq. 1 and Eq. 2 is used to covert the $k_s$ of square footing to $k_s$ of rectangular footing (Das, 2007)

$$k_s(B, B) = k_{300mm} * \left( \frac{B+0.3}{2B} \right)^2$$

(1)

$$k_s(B, L) = k_s(B, B) * \left( \frac{1+0.5\frac{B}{L}}{1.5} \right)$$

(2)

where: $k_s$ is the modulus of subgrade reaction of the rectangular foundation having dimension of $B$ (35m) * $L$ (58m) and $k_{300mm}$ is the subgrade reaction modulus under a plate of diameter of 300mm. The value of $k_s$ from Equations (1 and 2) is 109.25 MN/m³ for saturated point under foundation.

Also, the deformation modulus (Erm) was calculated from Figure 4 (b) for saturated case as 548.2 MPa.

3. RESULTS AND ROCK MASS ANALYSIS

3.1 Uniaxial Compression Strength (UCS)

The UCS was conducted for both core samples obtained from the foundation of building so as to use it to study the rock mass behavior. A strain rate of 0.002 mm/sec was used for application of axial load. The test was conducted as per ISRM (1981). The samples were saturated by putting them in water for three days.

The results of UCS of saturated samples are presented in Table (2). This property was used to study the rock mass behavior in the foundation of the proposed project. As can be seen that the UCS values of Marlsone is much less than that of Sandstone layer. Therefore, it is believed that the strength of Marlsone controls the behavior of rock mass at the foundation of Building A10. The average value of UCS of marl layer is 16.5 MPa. This value is used in the analysis of rock mass classification.
Table (2): UCS test results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rock Sample No.</th>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>Dry Density (gm/cm³)</th>
<th>water content %</th>
<th>Uniaxial Compressive Strength (UCS) (MPa)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>2.572</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>100.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>2.596</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>2.565</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>130.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Marl</td>
<td>2.434</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Marl</td>
<td>2.425</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Marl</td>
<td>2.459</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Chemical Tests

The chemical tests were conducted so as to find the sulfates content (SO₃ %) using XRF-Spectro and carbonates contents (CaCO₃ %) as percentages. These tests were conducted at Sulaimani Constructional laboratory (SCL). Also, organic material content was obtained. The results of chemical tests for the selected rock samples are presented in Table (3). According to these results, the ordinary Portland cement can be used in the foundations of the building.

Table (3): Chemical tests for selected soil samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>SO3%</th>
<th>Organic materials.%</th>
<th>CaCO3 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlstone</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 RMR classification system

The Rock Mass Rating (RMR) system was used to classify the rock mass of building A10 foundation. The rock mass at the foundation was taken as one geotechnical unit. Because there are three planes (two joint sets with a bedding plane) as presented in Figure 2, the lowest rating should be taken into account. The lowest rating was for bedding layer which is the bedding plane that has a dip of about 27 degrees. To calculate the RMR, six parameters are required. From the first five parameters, the basic RMR can be calculated. Table 4 presents the parameters and their rating.

Table (4): Rating of the Building foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UCS (MPa)</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQD %</td>
<td>25-50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measure from the chosen Scan Lines in Figure 5

| Spacing (mm)               | >60    | 8      |
| Discontinuity length (m)   | >20m   | 0      |

| Discontinuity condition    |        |        |
### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aperture (mm)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roughness</td>
<td>Slightly rough</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infilling</td>
<td>Soft filling &lt;5mm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weathering</td>
<td>Slightly weathered</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground water</td>
<td>Damp</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic RMR</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The basic RMR can be adjusted to find the final RMR using the joint orientations. The orientation is favorably (Dip=27 degree). According to Table 5, the final RMR is 37.

The deformability and shear strength parameters of rock masses can be obtained using the final RMR which is 37. From section C of Table 5 the rock class number is IV, which indicates poor rock quality. By matching this number in section D of Table 5, the designed values for friction angle and cohesion were 23.4 degree and 184.2 kPa, respectively. The deformation modulus ($E_{rm}$) of rock masses was computed using Equation 3:by Serafim and Pereira (1983). As a result, the value of $E_{rm}$ was calculated as 4.732 GPa.

$$E_{rm} = 10^{\frac{(RMR - 10)}{40}} \text{ (in GPa)}$$ (3)
3.4 Geological Strength Index (GSI)

Hoek (1994) and Hoek et al. (1995) developed GSI system as a direct replacement for Rock Mass Rating that was developed by Bieniawski and Orr (1976), and Bieniawski (1989). The GSI was suggested to develop a system to characterize the jointed rock mass and to estimate the strength and deformability indirectly (Cai et al., 2004). In this system, the parameters (Ø and c) of the equivalent Mohr-Coulomb criterion as well as elastic deformation ($E_{rm}$) can be obtained. However, the Hoek-Brown criterion should only be used for isotropic rock masses (Fortsakis et al., 2012; Hoek and Brown, 1980).
In this system, the shear strength parameter and deformation modulus of intact rock, found from laboratory tests, are reduced according to the properties of joint sets in the rock mass unit (Hoek and Brown, 2019). The texture of the rock mass is seen from the excavation of the rock mass of the investigated area (see Figure 5), which was revealed during the process of the foundation excavation of building no. A10 at the site. The rock mass is a fairly-interlocked blocky rock mass. This information can be used as input data to the software RocLab v 1.033 (Hoek et al., 2002) in order to get the deformability and strength properties of the foundation of the project. Figure (6) presents the suggested model for the studied area obtained from the RocLab software; the value of GSI is approximately equal to 34. The results of the mechanical properties are shown in Figure (7).

Hoek and Diederichs (2006) suggested two new relationships (Equations 4, 5) using a sigmoid function to predict the deformation modulus of a rock mass. These equations were developed after an analysis of field deformation moduli for a huge number of rock masses from Taiwan and China. Equation 4 is used where only GSI data are available, whereas Equation 5 can be used where real value of the intact rock modulus and GSI data are obtainable. These equations are generally applicable for isotropic rock mass.

\[
E_{rm} (MPa) = 100,000 \left( \frac{1-D}{e^{((75+25D-GSI)/11)}} \right)
\]

(4)

\[
E_{rm} = E_i \left(0.02 + \frac{1-D}{e^{((60+15D-GSI)/11)}} \right)
\]

(5)

Fig. (5): the fabric of the rock mass at foundation of building A10. Note: SL indicates the Scan lines.
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4. DISCUSSION AND ASSESSMENT

The shear strength and deformability parameters produce by two methods are presented in Table 6. The friction angle predicted by RMR is less than that predicted by GSI, whereas the cohesion by GSI is less than that produced by RMR. It appears that GSI

Figure 6 GSI value for the rock mass produced by RocLab code (Hoek et al., 2002)

Fig. (7): Results of rock mass strength by RocLab code (Hoek et al., 2002)
overestimates the friction parameter. This is also concluded by Alshkane (2015) when he used the Universal Distinct Element Code (UDEC) to analyse the shear strength parameters of a rock mass under a dam foundation.

Concerning the deformability properties, the result of Erm from plate load test was compared with the RMR and GSI results. It can be seen that the value of Erm produced by plate load test is near from the result of GSI than RMR. Therefore, the Erm by GSI is recommended for settlement calculation of the building foundation (A10). It was also concluded that plate load test can be certainly used to determine the deformability parameter of a rock mass, since there is a difficulty in testing large jointed rock samples in the laboratory at this time. The classification systems only provide the empirical equation to calculate the deformation modulus, and from Table 6 it can be concluded that the RMR overestimates the value of deformation modulus whereas GSI system gives reasonable result. Similar results were concluded by Alshkane (2015) when he used UDEC to analyze the foundation of Surqawshan dam in Sulaimani governate in Iraq.

For quick prediction of deformability and strength parameters, especially for weak sedimentary rock like the Tanjero formation in Iraq, the deformation modulus can be estimated using GSI system; however, the shear strength parameters can be safely estimated using RMR. According to the results of this study, it can be suggested that this rock formation needs more investigation so as to design the foundation of building economically and safely.

### Table (6): Strength and deformability parameters produce by different methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Friction angle</th>
<th>Cohesion (kPa)</th>
<th>Elastic modulus (MPa)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RMR</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>184.2</td>
<td>4731.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSI</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39.52</td>
<td>146.0</td>
<td>314.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate Load Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>548.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, the shear strength parameters and deformability were investigated using RMR and GSI rock systems for a real foundation of multistory building on a weak rock formation as a result the following conclusions are drawn:

1) The internal friction angle predicted by GSI is much higher than that predicted by RMR.
2) The equivalent cohesion of the rock mass produced by RMR is slightly higher than that by GSI system
3) The predicted modulus of deformability of the rock mass by GSI system is more realistic than that produced by RMR as compared with deformation modulus by field plate load test.
4) Based on load-settlement relationship under saturated condition, the modulus of subgrade reaction (ks) of 107.5 MN/m³ can be considered in designing of the foundation.

Based on this study, the deformation modulus can be predicted from the GSI system, whereas the strength parameters can be predicted using RMR.

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