

MFRPN: Towards High-Quality Region Proposal Generation in Object Detection

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Abstract. Most state-of-the-art object detection networks need region proposals in their two-step framework. Popular region proposal networks can provide hundred proposals with acceptable accuracy. In this paper, we introduce a Multiple Filters Region Proposal Network (MFRPN) that can change its structure with dataset. We calculate the suitable sizes of filters and use multiple filters with appropriate reference boxes to make the regression of coordinates of proposals more accurate. To illustrate the proposed MFRPN, we adopt the framework of Faster R-CNN [1] and replace the RPN with the MFRPN. As a result, we get 0.98% improvement in mean AP on PASCAL VOC 2007 and 1.45% on PASCAL VOC 2012.

Keywords: Object detection · Multiple filters · Reference box
Region proposal

1 Introduction

Object detection is to detect specific objects in images. Generally, it consists two steps: finding where the objects are (proposals generation), then giving these objects category labels and confidence scores (objects classification). This two-step division matches to visual mechanism of human beings. We first give a scan of the whole image to get the region we really care about. Then we observe carefully for more details to identify what we look at. Although one-step object detection algorithms (e.g., YOLO [12] and SSD [10]) exist, their prediction accuracy is lower than two-step algorithms. In this paper, we focus on improving two-step object detection algorithms. Based on the difference of one-step and two-step algorithms, we can draw a conclusion that proposals are useful for object detection asking for high accuracy. Our algorithm Multiple Filters Region Proposal Network (MFRPN) settles down to generating high-quality proposals. As we will

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show in following sections, detection network with MFRPN shows advantages in detection accuracy.

In early time, proposals are generated by some classical algorithms (e.g., Selective Search [16] and EdgeBox [17]) which provide about thousands of proposals per image to insure covering all the possible objects. However, these solutions are summarized by experts. They have their weaknesses in some situations. Thanks to the development of deep learning, the work of extracting features from pictures is done perfectly by Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN). CNN has rich representation capacity and powerful generalization ability and it can take advantage of computing ability of GPU. Therefore, we can get more accurate features of objects easily.

Nowadays, most state-of-the-art object detection networks use the Region Proposal Network (RPN) [14] to generate proposals for object detection (e.g., Faster R-CNN [14] and R-FCN [3]). RPN has several convolutional layers, one regression layer and one classification layer. To effectively generate different scales or aspect ratios proposals, RPN uses multiple references for every predicted boxes regression work (typically, 9 different reference boxes). But in this method, many hyper-parameters are set directly, such as, the sizes of reference boxes. The construction of a nice network model should be data-driven. If parameters of a model are changed with dataset, we believe it has universality and stability. The original RPN is not suitable for images which include small (Fig. 1a) or dense (Fig. 1b) objects. Because proposals of these images need more accurate predicted coordinates and a confined network cannot deal with it well. We also notice that the sizes of receptive fields are important to generate proposals. Sizes of receptive fields should be close to the sizes of reference boxes.

If receptive fields are too small, it may cause under-fitting problem. Because the information is too little to make correct decision. Oppositely, If receptive fields are too large, it may cause over-fitting problem. Because much information is redundant. For example, a network may misunderstand that chairs must be put next to a table. Our MFRPN has the ability to deal with details and all multiple filters (kernel sizes are different) on the last layer of CNN has suitable reference boxes. We believe MFRPN can solve the problems above.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 1. Example images with complex contents: (a) full of small objects, (b) dense similar objects.

Figure 2 shows our idea clearly. The size of receptive field determine how much information a RPN can get in one time regression. If receptive fields are too large or too small, the features extracted by a RPN will be more or less then the object itself. So we choose suitable sizes of reference boxes in our object detection network. Since different categories of objects have their own standard sizes. We should use different filters for different objects. And training networks with multiple filters simultaneously can make regression smoother. In conclusion, our main contributions are:

1. We emphasis appropriate mount of information is quite important for regression. The information here is a part of an image in receptive field. So the size of the filter on the last convolution layer should be changed with dataset and match the object's size.
2. We summarize the phenomenon that appropriate sizes of reference boxes are important for boxes regression. It means the sizes of reference boxes should match their filters receptive fields rather than the object itself.
3. We design multiple filters region proposal network. For small and dense object detection, we can use multiple filters with similar sizes. For detecting object with various sizes, we can use multiple filters with various sizes.

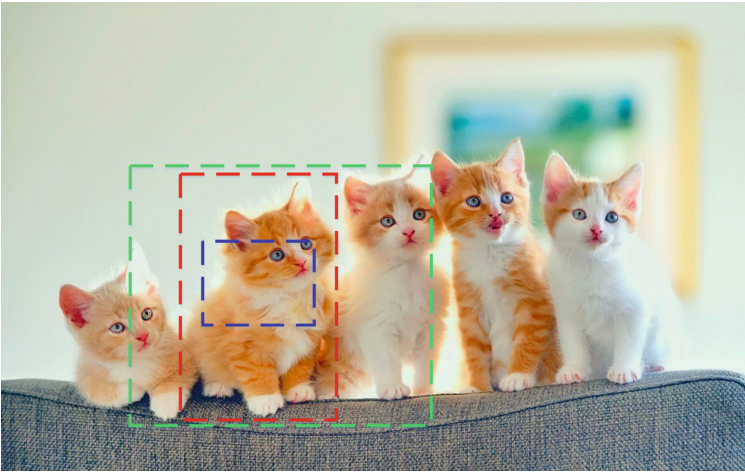


Fig. 2. Our idea: Small receptive field (blue) cannot get the whole features of object. Large receptive filed (green) will bring wrong features. Appropriate receptive filed (red) make regression more accurate. (Color figure online)

2 Related Work

There are diverse methods for generating object proposals. The most widely used unsupervised method is Selective Search [16]. It is a clustering method. Other

popular clustering method are EdgeBox [17] and MCG [1]. The advantage of clustering methods is they can provide proposals of multiple scales and sizes spontaneously. BING [2], MultiBox [4] are typical in supervised methods. BING uses the binary feature which can be promoted computing speed by registers. MultiBox uses CNN to generate proposals. But recently proposed promising solution, Region Proposal Network (RPN) [14], has more excellent performance. It uses multi-task loss function to combine proposals generation and coordinates regression together in one step. RPN can reduce the number of proposals to less than 300 with higher recall rate. In our experiments, we uses RPN as the baseline algorithm.

The RPN in Faster RCNN adopts 3 aspect ratios (1:1, 1:2, 2:1) and 3 scales (128^2 , 256^2 , 512^2) anchor boxes as reference boxes basing on the Simonyan and Zisserman model (VGG-16) [15]. Different aspect ratios anchor boxes are convenient to generate different shape proposals. Different scales anchor boxes are used for generating multiple scales proposal more accurately. The size of 3 scales are designed elaborately which are smaller than the receptive field, nearly equal to the receptive field and larger than the receptive field. But their information are all come from the same piece of feature map. That is to say if the predicted field matches the size of receptive field, the predicted result will be more reliable. So we claim that reference boxes should not much larger than receptive field of filter. And we should pay more attention to details in receptive field.

YOLO 9000 [13] clusters images by size and changes the reference boxes' sizes with dataset. But it doesn't change the filters' sizes. We believe that changing dataset should bring changes in filters' sizes. And changing filters should bring changes in reference boxes, too. Appropriate filters are more important than reference boxes.

As for multiple filters train simultaneously, SPP [6] and Grid Loss [11] does the similar but different job. SPP proposes a spatial pyramid pooling layer which uses multiple kernel sizes to get a fixed-length representation. Grid Loss proposes a novel loss layer for CNN which minimizes error rate on both sub-blocks and the whole feature map. These algorithms focus on use the relationship of part and whole to detect objects. Because we expect to focus the whole object itself, we use kernels of multiple sizes separately.

In recent years, many novel methods have been proposed to improve prediction accuracy given by RPN. HyperNet [8] and FPN [9] are typical two of these methods. They try to use both high level and low level feature together to predict proposals. But we put attention to improve accuracy of coordinates regression. MFRPN is a new path to get better proposals and can cooperate with their networks.

3 Our Approach

In this section, we introduce Multiple Filter Region Proposal Network (MFRPN). We will explain how we design our network, how it works, and how to use MFRPN in an object detection network in detail.

3.1 Confirming Sizes of Filters

In this step, we will cluster all bounding boxes in our training set. And try to find appropriate filters which receptive fields are the nearest top K to clustering result. Figure 3 shows the relationship between reference box and bounding box. In this paper, we use k-means clustering method to solve this problem. There are three steps:

1. Run k-means clustering on dataset to divide sizes of objects into K categories.
2. According to the used network, calculate the corresponding relationship between filters and receptive fields.
3. Confirm sizes of filters on the last convolution layer which receptive fields are the nearest top K to bounding boxes clustering result.

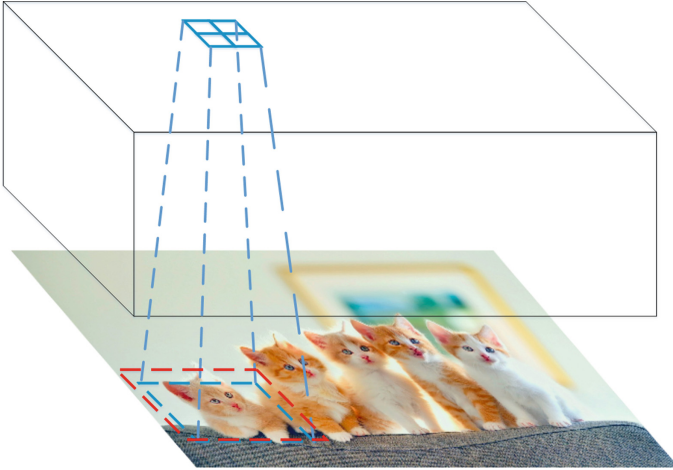


Fig. 3. The relationship between receptive field (blue) and bounding box (red) in our network. We try to use filters with appropriate receptive fields. (Color figure online)

3.2 Multiple Filters Region Proposal Networks

After calculating filters' sizes, We will build our region proposal network. The MFRPN is several convolutional layers (Fig. 4). We use K small networks to slide over the feature map output by the last convolutional layer [14]. Note that the K here is equal to K in k-means clustering. These small networks take $n_1^2 \sim n_k^2$ part of the last feature map. That means the kernel sizes of the networks' filters are $n_1 \sim n_k$. Although the sizes of filters are different, we equal the numbers of outputs of filters. In this paper, the number of outputs is 512. So every filter generates 512-d lower-dimensional features. Every independent convolutional layer is followed by two 1×1 convolutional layers. One for classification, one for coordinates regression.

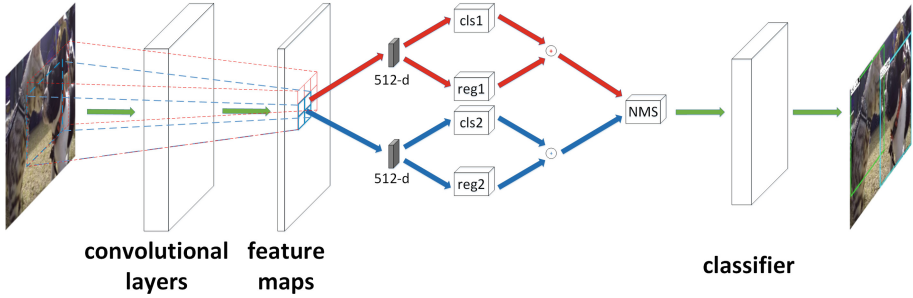


Fig. 4. MFRPN object detection architecture. This architecture can be extended to include more than two filters to generate high-quality proposals. Our experiments just use 2 filters for demonstration. Different filters provide different proposals which are merged by NMS.

In the adopted network (VGG-16), the receptive fields of filters is showed in Table 1. We will choose the appropriate filter for each category clustered in Sect. 3.1.

Table 1. The size of receptive fields of filters in VGG-16.

Size of filter	1×1	2×2	3×3	4×4	5×5	6×6
Size of receptive field	196^2	212^2	228^2	244^2	260^2	276^2

3.3 Extensible Loss Function

For training MFRPNs, we use multi-task loss function. And all filters contribute to the loss. The loss function for an image is defined as:

$$L(p_{ki}, t_{ki}) = \frac{1}{N_{cls}} \sum_k \sum_i L_{cls}(p_{ki}, p_i^*) + \frac{1}{N_{reg}} \sum_k \lambda_k \sum_i p_i^* L_{reg}(t_{ki}, t_i^*). \quad (1)$$

In this equation, i is the index of a reference box in a mini-batch, k is the index of multiple filters. p_{ki} is the probability of reference box being an object predicted by filter k . But the ground-truth label p_i^* is independent of filters. If reference box is positive, p_i^* is 1. And if reference box is negative, p_i^* is 0. In second part of the equation, t_{ki} (t_i^*) is 4-d feature stands for coordinates of the center of a predicted box (reference box), height and width normalized in method proposed in [5]. L_{cls} is log loss, L_{reg} is robust loss [5], defined as:

$$L_{reg}(t_{ki}, t_i^*) = \sum_{i \in x, y, w, h} smooth_{L_1}(t_{ki} - t_i^*). \quad (2)$$

in which

$$smooth_{L_1} = \begin{cases} 0.5x^2 & \text{if } |x| < 1 \\ |x| - 0.5 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

The two part loss functions are normalized by N_{cls} and N_{reg} . In this paper N_{cls} (=256) and N_{reg} (≈ 2400) are balanced by λ_k , and λ_k are all 10 in this paper. As we can see, the closer to ground truth, the more accurate regression is. Because the loss is quadratic, when the difference value is in $(-1, 1)$. But MFRPN uses multiple filters to train convolutional layers together. In this case, there are more difference values in $(-1, 1)$. So our algorithm makes the regression smoother.

3.4 Training Object Detection Network with MFRPN

For training MFRPN, we follow the training method in [14]. But we use different labels and box-targets for different filters. In each mini-batch, we use 256 different reference boxes for each filter.

In this paper, we use the Fast R-CNN [5] as our classification network. For training object detection network with MFRPN, we use 4-Step Alternating Training [14] algorithm.

4 Experiments

To compare with Faster R-CNN we replace the RPN of Faster R-CNN with our MFRPN. It is worth mentioning that our convolution layers can be replaced by other CNNs like ResNet [7] and our classification network can be replaced, too. We use PASCAL VOC 2007 and 2012 dataset in training and testing phase.

4.1 Experiments on Choosing Filters

We choose k-means as our clustering method. The distance between two objects is defined as:

$$distance(a, b) = -IOU(a, b) \quad (4)$$

In this step, the position of object is useless. So we move all the bounding boxes to the top left corner and then calculate the distance. Table 2 shows some clustering results on PASCAL VOC 2007 and PASCAL VOC 2012 dataset.

Table 2. Part of clustering results on PASCAL VOC 2007 training set. We change the number of clustering categories for each experiment.

	K = 2	K = 3
VOC 2007	70 × 93 263 × 253	54 × 74 147 × 183 340 × 287
VOC 2012	71 × 90 277 × 262	53 × 67 150 × 188 352 × 294

We will use $K = 2$ in this paper. Combined with Table 1 can be seen, the appropriate sizes of filters are 1×1 and 5×5 for PASCAL VOC 2007, 1×1 and 6×6 for PASCAL VOC 2012.

4.2 Experiments on Changing Reference Boxes

We claim that reference box must match the receptive field. We use the Faster R-CNN [14] as the basic experimental method. Faster R-CNN use the RPN to generate proposals. On the last convolutional layer, the size of filter is 3. From the Table 1 we can find the receptive field of this filter is 218. Faster R-CNN uses multiple references. The sizes of the references are $128^2, 256^2, 512^2$. As we can see, 512^2 is much larger than the filter’s receptive field, so we change the references to $64^2, 128^2, 256^2$. The results are showed in Table 3.

Table 3. Detection results on PASCAL VOC 2007. We use different sizes of reference boxes, noting that the receptive fields are all close to 256.

	Size of filter	Reference boxes	Mean AP
1	3	$128^2, 256^2, 512^2$	69.94
2	3	$64^2, 128^2, 256^2$	70.62

From these results, we find the original network gets the lowest mean AP. Because the original reference boxes are much larger than the receptive field. It means, in a mini-batch, there are too many unknown factors to predict. The reference boxes experimental results meet our idea that appropriate sizes of reference boxes are good for generating high-quality proposals.

In our next experiments, we chose $1 \times 1, 5 \times 5$ and 6×6 filters to extract feature vectors. So we choose $64^2, 128^2, 256^2$ as the sizes of our reference boxes.

4.3 Experiments on Using Multiple Filters

We believe multiple filters can improve detection accuracy. Since images of PASCAL VOC are small. So our filters are similar sizes. Our theory is dividing receptive field more accurately is necessary. So in our experiments, multiple filters are smaller than single filter. We use multiple filters on the last convolutional layer of RPN and keep other parameters the same as Faster R-CNN. The results are showed in Table 4. When using multiple filters, the mean AP increases by over 0.15%. Although the improvement is little, it proves that multiple filters have a beneficial effect on generating high-quality proposals.

Table 4. Detection results on PASCAL VOC 2007. We use multiple filters. In this experiment, sizes of filters are 2 and 3.

	Size of filter	Reference box	Mean AP
1	3	$128^2, 256^2, 512^2$	69.94
2	2 & 3	$128^2, 256^2, 512^2$	70.02

Table 7. Results on PASCAL VOC 2012 test set (trained on VOC 2012 trainval) with detectors of Faster R-CNN and VGG-16. The proposals are generated by different methods. To show the stability of our network, we keep 1300 proposals after NMS in MFRPN experiment, too.

	mean AP	areo	bike	bird	boat	bottle	bus	car	cat		
RPN	66.99	82.33	76.43	71.02	48.37	45.20	72.08	72.27	87.25		
MFRPN	68.44	83.92	78.17	71.17	51.69	46.80	77.24	72.63	88.14		
chair	cow	table	dog	horse	mbike	person	plant	sheep	sofa	train	tv
42.18	73.72	50.03	86.76	78.68	78.36	77.35	34.50	70.11	57.08	77.14	58.93
43.47	73.04	51.81	86.96	80.24	81.54	77.86	36.02	69.01	56.64	81.35	61.19



Fig. 5. Examples of our detection results.

We also compare the running time between baseline and our method. Because we use multi-task loss to implement our method, the training time is almost the same as the baseline. But during test phase, our method spend more time. In our experiment (NVIDIA TITAN X (Pascal)), the average test time is 0.350 s. Although the time is higher than the baseline which is 0.236 s, the speed is acceptable.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we propose the Multiple Filters Region Proposal Network (MFRPN) for generating high-quality region proposals. The proposed MFRPN can change its structure with dataset. According to the general classification of objects' sizes, MFRPN can choose nice filters to cover objects automatically.

Then MFRPN adopts appropriate reference boxes and multiple filters to get more accurate proposals.

It can cooperate with most two-step object detection networks. And it is compatible with other improved methods of RPN. In conclusion, our method improves state-of-the-art object detection not only accuracy but also stability.

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