# Diverse Level Generation for Tile-Based Video Game using Generative Adversarial Networks from Few Samples

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Abstract: The procedural generation of levels in video games has been studied mainly to reduce the burden on producers. In recent years, methods based on deep learning have been attracting attention. In level generations with deep learning, GAN-based methods have achieved some success in tile-based video games, but the preparation of the dataset has been an issue. In this study, we investigate a method to acquire a model that can generate various levels by learning a GAN from only a small amount of data. It was confirmed that a greater variety and lower playability of levels can be generated than with conventional methods by quantitative evaluation of the levels generated by the proposed methods. In addition, the model learned by the proposed method can generate levels that reflect the objectives more strongly than the conventional method by using CMA-ES to search for latent variables.

### **1** INTRODUCTION

Research on automatic game content creation technology, known as Procedural Content Generation (PCG), has been active since the birth of video games. Among video game content, levels are directly related to the difficulty and fun of a game, but the cost of manually generating many levels is high. Therefore, many studies on automatic level generation are being conducted with the motivation of reducing the burden on game creators. In recent years, PCG has also been used to develop an environment for evaluating and learning game AI (Justesen et al., 2018).

With the development of deep generative models, deep learning has been increasingly used in PCG (Liu et al., 2020). In tile-based video games, level generation using GANs, one of the deep generative models, has been successful. However, the cost of preparing data sets for training GANs is an issue, and it is generally difficult to train generators that generate diverse levels from a few samples. In video game level generation models, the ability to generate diverse levels is important to create different game experiences or to create levels that are consistent with a concept from a variety of levels. A variety of levels is also necessary to evaluate and improve the generalization performance of AI. Generators with neural networks can generate a large amount of data in parallel, so if a variety of levels can be generated, the desired level can be selected from among many candidates.

In this study, we investigate a learning method for GANs that can generate a variety of levels from only a small amount of training set. Learning a generator that can generate diverse levels makes it possible to not only select good levels from generated levels but also use more effectively the level generation method that reflects the objective by optimizing latent variables as inputs to the GAN (Volz et al., 2018). In this paper, we proposed a data augmentation method that adds levels that satisfy the constraints among the levels generated by GAN as training data and regularization terms in GAN training that facilitate the exploration of diverse levels. We prepare several evaluation indicators for quantitative evaluation and the experimental results showed that the model trained by the proposed method was able to generate more diverse levels than the model trained by the conventional method. Although the playability was reduced, it was quantitatively confirmed that the model trained by the proposed method was able to generate more diverse levels than the one by conventional methods. We also confirmed that models trained by the proposed method can generate playable and more objective-reflected levels than conventional methods

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by exploring the latent space.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides research backgrounds on PCG with deep learning. Section 3 describes the proposed method, followed by experiments and results in Section 4. Finally, we conclude the paper and discuss future work.

#### 2 BACKGROUND

# 2.1 Procedural Content Generation (PCG)

The procedural generation of video game content, called Procedural Content Generation, has been studied for many years, and a variety of game content has been generated by algorithms. Within the field of PCG, game level generation is the most popular, and many studies have targeted 2D tile-based games such as Super Mario Bros. side-scrolling action games and exploration-based action games called roguelike games. (Nelson, 2016). In recent years, deep learning has achieved remarkable results in content generation, such as images and text. Thus, its usefulness in the field of PCG is expected to increase, and research on the use of deep generative models and deep reinforcement learning for game content generation is gaining momentum (Liu et al., 2020; Gisslén et al., 2021; Bontrager and Togelius, 2021; Khalifa et al., 2020).

# 2.2 Generative Adversarial Networks(GAN)

Adversarial Generative Network (GAN), one of the generative models based on deep learning, has been actively studied mainly as a generative model for images since it was proposed by Goodfellow et al. (Goodfellow et al., 2014) in 2014 and has achieved remarkable results in image generation. In a basic GAN, in addition to the generator, a neural network that generates data, a discriminator, a network that discriminates between data generated by the generator and real data, is trained alternately to make the distribution of data generated by the generator closer to the distribution of real data. This is done by alternately training the discriminator, which is a network that discriminates between the data generated by the generator and the real data. Specifically, the generator G is learned through a minimax game using the value function V(D,G) formulated in the form of the equation (1).

$$\min_{D} \max_{G} V(D,G) = \mathbb{E}_{x \sim p_{data}}[\log D(x)] + \mathbb{E}_{z \sim p_z}[\log D(G(z))]$$
(1)

# 2.3 Procedural Content Generation using Generative Adversarial Networks

In recent years, research on level generation using GANs has been successful. Volz et al. (Volz et al., 2018) used DCGAN (Radford et al., 2015) to generate levels for Super Mario Bros. and proposed a method to generate levels that satisfy specified objectives by optimizing latent variables in the GAN using Covariance Matrix Adaption Evolution Strategy (CMA-ES) (Hansen et al., 2003), a black box optimization method based on evolutionary computation. The proposed method generates a level that satisfies the specified objective by optimizing latent variables of the GAN. Torrado et al. (Rodriguez Torrado et al., 2020) performed level generation in the Zelda environment of the GVGAI Framework (Perez-Liebana et al., 2018) using a model based on Self-Attention in SAGAN (Zhang et al., 2018) for the generator and discriminator. By combining the information on the number of tiles on each level with the Self-Attention Map and performing conditional generation, it was shown that level generation with higher playability and a lower percentage of duplicated levels were achieved than with conventional DCGAN generation. A method for learning GANs from a small number of data by adding data generated by the generator as training data during the GAN training process is also proposed, and it is reported that 47% of the 15,000 levels generated were playable and 60.3% were duplicates. In addition, GAN-based level generation methods have been studied for various tilebased video games (Awiszus et al., 2020; Hald et al., 2020; Park et al., 2019; Steckel and Schrum, 2021; Kumaran et al., 2020).

# **3 METHOD**

In this study, we aim to generate a variety of levels in tile-based video games using GANs from only a small number of training data. We propose a method that focuses on a loss function during model training and a better augmentation of training data with GANgenerated data.

# 3.1 Data Augmentation with Generated Levels

This study diversifies the training data by adding the levels generated to the dataset during the GAN training process, as in the bootstrap method of Torrado et al, so that the generator can generate a variety of data. In this study, we propose two methods of data augmentation.

#### 3.1.1 Conventional Bootstrap Method

In a previous work (Rodriguez Torrado et al., 2020), the bootstrap method was proposed to improve the diversity of the training set by periodically adding playable levels to the training set during model training. In this method, the generated playable levels are mapped into a two-dimensional space using PCA, and then clustered using the Elbow and k-means methods, and the level closest to the center of gravity of each is selected and added to the training set.

#### 3.1.2 Method 1: Bootstrap with Filtering

An overview of this method is shown in Figure 1. Conventional bootstrap method was a method to in-



Figure 1: An overview of proposed method 1.

crease the number of training data by adding playable data to the dataset during the training of the GAN. This method does not compare the data to be added to the dataset with the data in the dataset, which may result in the levels in the dataset being similar to each other. To avoid the problem of biased data in the dataset, this method compares all levels in the dataset with the levels to be added when adding levels, and adds only those with a large hamming distance (the number of tiles of different types placed at the same location when two levels are compared). This would add more novelty to the level and deal with the issue of bias in the dataset. It is possible that a better criterion could be used to reduce the bias of the data, but that is a subject for future work. In this study, we used a simple hamming distance criterion that is applicable

# 3.1.3 Method 2: Separeted Augmenration and Training

An overview of this method is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: An overview of proposed method 2.

In the method with bootstrap, even with the process of Method 1, if the distribution of data in the dataset is biased, a cycle could occur in which the data to be generated will also be biased. Therefore, we propose a method to create and train a less biased dataset by separating the training part of the GAN from the augmentation of the training data. In this method, the GAN used for data augmentation is learned from the original data, and the playable levels generated by the GAN are used to train a new GAN model. This method is inspired by previous work (Park et al., 2019).

In this method, two types of models are prepared. An augmentation model, which performs data augmentation, and a performance model, which learns with the augmented data. The augmentation model is trained by augmenting data using training set for the augmentation model according to Method 1, and the levels bootstrapped by the augmentation model is also added to training set for the performance model. When the size of training set of the performance model is large enough, the performance model is trained from the training set. As the augmentation model is trained, training set for the augmentation model may become biased, but the weights of the learned model and the initialization of training set for the augmentation model are periodically performed to ensure that the bias does not worsen. This will result in a less biased training set for the performance model, which can be used to train GANs from a wide variety of levels.

#### 3.2 Diversity Loss

In order to generate various levels in the GAN training process, a regularization term that maximizes the L1 distance between generated data in a minibatch is added to the loss function during training. In the implementation, it averages the L1 distance between the two samples in the minibatch and adds the term weighted by the coefficient  $\lambda_{div}$  to the generator's loss function.

We propose to train GAN by gradient descent according to following equation (3), (4), which is the Hinge Adversarial Loss (Lim and Ye, 2017) plus a regularization term  $L_{div}$ .  $L_D$  and  $L_G$  are loss functions by minibatch of the discriminator D and generator Grespectively. x is sampled from training set, z is sampled from standard normal distributions and m is the size of the minibatch.

This regularization term is expected to facilitate the exploration of levels different from the levels in training set in the GAN learning process.

$$L_{div} = -\lambda_{div} \frac{1}{m-1} \sum_{i=0}^{m-1} |G(\boldsymbol{z}^{(i)}) - G(\boldsymbol{z}^{(i+1)})| \quad (2)$$

$$L_D = \frac{1}{m} \sum_{i=0}^{m} \left[ -\min(0, -1 + D(\boldsymbol{x}^{(i)})) -\min(0, -1 - D(G(\boldsymbol{z}^{(i)}))) \right]$$
(3)

$$L_G = \left[\frac{1}{m} \sum_{i=0}^{m} \left[-D(G(\boldsymbol{z}^{(i)}))\right] + L_{div}\right]$$
(4)

#### 4 EXPERIMENTS AND RESULTS

We evaluated and discussed quantitatively and visually the ability of the proposed method to learn GANs from a small amount of data and to generate levels and their diversity for a tile-based video game. We also optimized latent variables using CMA-ES for the model obtained by the proposed method, and verified the degree to which it is able to generate levels in accordance with the objectives.

#### 4.1 Experimental Settings

#### 4.1.1 The Zelda Environment from GVGAI Framework

In this study, the Zelda environment of the GVGAI Framework was used as the environment for level generation. In this environment, the player moves on a grid-like level with a height of 12 and a width of 16, and completes the game by obtaining keys and reaching the goal square. Enemies may be present on the level and must be defeated by avoiding or attacking them. The level consists of a total of eight types of squares, including wall squares, floor squares, enemy squares etc.. The following constraints must be satisfied for a level to be playable.



Figure 3: Original levels used for training GAN.

- There is only one player, one key, and one goal tile.
- The key and goal tiles are reachable from the player tile.
- The level is surrounded by wall tiles.

Five manually created levels which shown as Figure 3 were used as the training data for the GAN.

#### 4.1.2 Model Architecture

The levels are represented as a 3D tensor of size (8,12,16) and total of 8 different tiles allocated in the channel direction. When converting the generator output tensor to a level, the tile corresponding to the channel with the highest value is selected for each position. In generator and discriminator, three convolution layer and two self-attention layer, which has been shown to be effective in previous works (Chen and Lyu, 2022; Rodriguez Torrado et al., 2020), were used. The detailed model structure is shown in Table 4 and Table 5 in the appendix.

#### 4.1.3 Experimental Parameters

The settings for each parameter during GAN training are shown in Table 6 in the appendix. Note that the bootstrap method is implemented by starting the training with an initial dataset of  $5 \times 7 = 35$  since the minibatch size is 32 and adding data satisfying the constraints to the dataset every 10 epochs. In Method 1 and 2, only levels with a hamming distance of less than 90% to each level in the training set were added. In Method 2, the data was augmented with augmentation models until 1000 levels were generated. The weights of the model were initialized every time 50 levels were generated, and the dataset was initialized every time 100 levels were generated.

# 4.2 Evaluation of Playability and Diversity

#### 4.2.1 Evaluation Metrics

In order to quantitatively evaluate the levels generated by the learned model, the following metrics are used.

**Playability.** Whether the generated levels satisfy the constraints, i.e., whether they are playable. In implementation, heuristics were used to check whether all constraints were satisfied.

- Average Hamming Distance(AHD). Average hamming distance for all pairs of generated levels.
- **Duplication Rate(DR).** Percentage of generated levels that are not unique.
- **Special Tile Matches(STM).** For all pairs of generated levels, the percentage of pairs for which the position of the only existing tile in Zelda, such as key, door, or player, matches.

Playability evaluation is necessary because the level generation model should generate playable levels. In addition, several indices were used to quantitatively measure the diversity of the generated levels. We considered that the greater the percentage of unique levels a generator can generate and the greater the hamming distance between generated levels, the more diverse the levels it can generate, so we used indices such as duplication rate and average hamming distance for quantitative evaluation. Furthermore, in Zelda, there are only one each of the squares for the key, goal, and player, and we considered these objects to be important in the game. To evaluate whether we were able to create different levels as a game experience, we used the percentage of agreement in the positions of these objects as an evaluation index. Playability and duplication rate was calculated from 10000 levels, while average hamming distance and special tile matches were calculated from 1000 levels.

#### 4.2.2 Results and Discussion

The results of the evaluation for each of the learned models are shown in Table 1 and 2. Examples of the levels generated by each method are shown in Figures 4,5,8 and 9. As a comparison method, we use the conventional method using only bootstrap in (Rodriguez Torrado et al., 2020) and the GAN training method without data augmentation and diversity Loss.

Comparing the proposed and conventional methods, the proposed methods outperform the conventional bootstrap method and the simple GAN method in terms of diversity indices such as average hamming distance, duplication rate, Special tile matches, and variance of each tile number, indicating that the proposed method is able to generate various levels. In the conventional bootstrap method, the model used in this experiment generated only levels that were close to specific levels in the early stages of training, so the dataset was biased as bootstrap continued to add only similar levels as training data, resulting in small differences between levels and a high duplication rate. A simple GAN could only generate levels that were nearly identical to the training dataset.

Comparing the proposed data augmentation methods, Method 1 and Method 2, the hamming distance between the generated data increased for Method 1, while the average number of tiles in the generated levels was significantly different from the original data. This may be due to the fact that the distribution of the level in the dataset gradually became more biased as generated levels was added to the dataset. In Method 2, the bias of the tile distribution and the value of special tile matches are smaller because the data was augmented so that level bias within the dataset is less likely to occur. On the other hand, playability is reduced. Most of the cases where a level cannot be generated correctly are those where the constraints on the number of keys, doors, and player tiles are not satisfied. The baseline method and the simple GAN method, where the position of these tiles is almost deterministic, show high playability, while the proposed method, where the positions of these tiles are diversified, shows low playability. As for the low playability, it could be improved by devising a model structure like CESAGAN, but since it is possible to generate a large number of levels in parallel, playable levels can be selected from among the many levels generated. It is also possible to generate playable levels with sufficient probability by searching for latent variables as described in the next subsection.

# 4.3 The Effectiveness of Evolutionary Latent Space Search

Since the proposed method has acquired a generator capable of various outputs, it can effectively utilize the method of generating levels following the objective by searching latent variables. In a previous work (Volz et al., 2018), it was shown that level generation reflecting the creator's objective is possible by optimizing the input latent variables according to the objective function using CMA-ES. CMA-ES is a black-box optimization algorithm based on evolutionary computation and performs continuous optimization by evolutionary computation using a multi-point search with a Gaussian distribution. By optimizing the latent vectors of the generator's inputs with CMA-ES, latent variables that generate levels in line with the objective function can be discovered.

In this part, we optimize latent variables for the following two objective functions  $F_1$  and  $F_2$  to examine the extent to which latent variables reflecting the objective functions can be generated. Note that P is a variable that takes 1 if the level is playable and 0 otherwise.

	Playability(%)↑	AHD↑	DR(%)↓	STM(%)↓
Ours (Method 1)	80.1	44.6	0.0	50.5
Ours (Method 2)	23.8	37.2	0.0	18.4
Conventional Bootstrap	87.6	13.3	10.7	53.2
Simple GAN	84.2	14.1	97.8	65.2
Original Levels	100.0	34.8	0.0	0.0

Table 1: Playability and diversity statistics of each method. These values are averages of 5 runs.

Table 2: Average and standard deviation of the number of tiles in each level. These values are averages of 5 runs.

	Wall		Floor		Enemy	
	avg.	std.	avg.	std.	avg.	std.
Ours (Method 1)	89.2	10.1	94.7	10.1	5.1	1.9
Ours (Method 2)	76.5	6.5	108.1	6.7	4.4	2.3
Conventional Bootstrap	68.0	3.9	117.3	3.6	3.7	1.3
Simple GAN	66.7	3.0	119.1	2.9	3.3	0.4
Original Levels	71.4	8.2	114.4	8.1	3.2	0.39

$$F_1 = 100P - \#walls - 5 \times \#enemies \tag{5}$$

$$F_2 = 100P + \#walls + 5 \times \#enemies \tag{6}$$

 $F_1$  was designed to maximize the number of walls and enemies while achieving a playable level, and  $F_2$ was designed to minimize the number of walls and enemies while achieving a playable level.

For the implementation, we used pycma<sup>1</sup>, a CMA-ES library in python, and initialized the number of initial population to 14 and the standard deviation to 0.5 for the optimization of 150 iterations. Examples of the results of optimization using the objective function of  $F_1, F_2$  with z sampled from the Gaussian distribution as the initial value for the model obtained by the proposed method using data augmentation method 2 are shown in Figure 6,7.

In both cases of optimization with  $F_1$  and  $F_2$ , the number of enemies and wall tiles can be varied as desired, indicating that the level can be generated in accordance with the objective to some extent. By comparing the playability of the proposed method and the conventional method after optimizing each from 50 different initial values and their average objective function values, we verified whether the proposed method is able to generate playable levels and how well the proposed method is able to edit them to meet the objectives compared to the conventional method.

From Table 3, both the proposed and conventional methods are able to obtain playable levels by optimizing latent variables. Comparing the average hamming distances of the generated levels, it can be seen that the model with the proposed method is able to generate more levels with various variations. In addition, comparing the objective function values, the model by the proposed method is as good at generating levels with few enemies and walls and outperforms the model using the existing method in generating levels with many enemies and walls. From this result, it can be said that the proposed method is more capable of generating levels that meet the objective due to its more diverse outputs.

# **5** CONCLUSION

In this study, we confirmed that various levels can be generated by GAN in the Zelda environment of the GVGAI Framework by expanding training data using generated data and regularizing during model training. We have found that we can generate numerically more diverse levels than GANs using conventional bootstrapping methods. Although playability is reduced, the latent variables can be optimized by CMA-ES to generate playable levels in seconds. Not only that, but the diversity of levels generated by the proposed method has increased, making it possible to generate levels that better reflect the intent of the objective function.

Although the proposed method was able to generate a variety of levels for Zelda, a relatively small game with less complex constraints, it is possible to generate a variety of levels for a game of this size by randomly placing walls and enemy tiles without using a GAN. Since the proposed method can be applied to other tile-based games, we will conduct experiments on games with larger or more complex levels to verify their effectiveness.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>https://github.com/CMA-ES/pycma



Figure 4: Examples of generated levels by proposed method 1. Figure 5: Examples of generated levels by proposed method 2.

Table 3: Playability and average values of objective function for levels generated from latent variables optimized by CMA-ES.

	$F_1$			$F_2$		
	Playability(%)↑	Value ↓	AHD ↑	Playability (%)↑	Value ↓	AHD ↑
Ours (Method 2)	100.0	-144.2	40.8	100.0	59.6	14.6
Conventional Bootstrap	100.0	-119.2	15.8	100.0	59.8	4.4



Figure 6: Results of optimization with  $F_1$  for the model trained by the proposed method (Method 2). Levels on the left are generated from the initial values, and levels on the right are generated from the optimal values.



Figure 7: Results of optimization with  $F_2$  for the model trained by the proposed method (Method 2). Levels on the left are generated from the initial values, and levels on the right are generated from the optimal values.

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## APPENDIX

Table 4: Model structure of generator.				
Layer	Shape			
Input A	(32,)			
Deconvolution	(512,3,4)			
Batch Normalization	(512,3,4)			
ReLU	(512,3,4)			
Upsample	(512,6,8)			
Convolution	(256,6,8)			
Batch Normalization	(256,6,8)			
ReLU	(256,6,8)			
Self-Attention	(256,6,8)			
Upsample	(256,12,16)			
Convolution	(128,12,16)			
Batch Normalization	(128,12,16)			
ReLU	(128,12,16)			
Self-Attention	(128,12,16)			
Convolution	(8,12,16)			
Softmax	(8,12,16)			
Output	(8,12,16)			

Table 5: Model structure of discriminator.

Layer	Shape	
Input	(8,12,16)	
Convolution	(128,12,16)	
Leaky ReLU	(128,12,16)	
Self-Attention	(128,12,16)	
Convolution	(256,6,8)	
Leaky ReLU	(256,6,8)	
Self-Attention	(256,6,8)	
Convolution	(512,3,4)	
Leaky ReLU	(512,3,4)	
Convolution	(1,)	
Output	(1,)	

Table 6: Experimental paran	neters
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	values
Latent size	32
Minibatch size	32
Optimization	RMSProp
Learning rate (G)	$5.0 \times 10^{-5}$
Learning rate (D)	$5.0 \times 10^{-5}$
$\lambda_{div}$	50.0
Training iterations	10000



Figure 8: Examples of generated levels by a conventional bootstrap GAN method.

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Figure 9: Examples of generated levels by a simple GAN method.