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A Novel Cost-Function for Transformer-based YOLO Algorithm to Detect Photovoltaic Panel Defects

Solar panel defects can lead to substantial efficiency loss and increased maintenance expenses. Conventional defect detection methods are often slow and ineffective. This study revisits the You Only Look Once (YOLO) algorithm and its variations, assessing their efficacy in identifying defects in thermal images of solar panels. Subsequently, we introduce a novel YOLO algorithm, termed YOLOS-PV, built upon the transformer-based YOLOS algorithm. The proposed algorithm introduces new loss function weights to prioritize localized objects and visualize the attention map of each transformer head within the YOLOS algorithm. In the experiments, the YOLOS-PV achieves a mAP@0.5:0.95 score of 0.894, surpassing the efficiency of other YOLO variants. Code implementation can be found here: [tella26/YOLOS-PV \(github.com\)](https://github.com/tella26/YOLOS-PV)

Keywords: Solar panels, defect detection, deep learning, YOLO models, cost function

1. INTRODUCTION

Rapid population growth and drastically increasing power requirements are critical concerns to address the energy needs [1,2]. However, traditional power plants cannot be built to meet the pace of increasing energy demands [3]. Solar power plants consist of numerous Solar Panels (SPs) organized in arrays on a supportive framework [4]. These panels can be installed on building rooftops or facades to supply electricity to the buildings [5]. However, the outdoor arrangement of the SPs exposes them to potentially harsh conditions, which can adversely affect their performance and lead to defects. These defects may include hotspots [6], cracks and corrosion [7], broken glass [8], and others, as outlined in Table 1.

Detecting defective solar panels has traditionally relied on experts, who, though reliable, can be inefficient [9]. Moreover, conventional methods like thermal and electrical modeling [10], which primarily analyze temperature and power output to assess performance, often fall short in detecting defects such as cracks or hotspots [11]. Optimal utilization of renewable energy systems depends on the harmonization of various processes like design, manufacturing, materials, technology, policy and regulations, standards, and testing [2, 12-15]. To overcome these constraints, a combination of imaging techniques, including Electroluminescence (EL), Infra-Red Thermography (IRT) [16], Lock-in Thermography (LIT) [17], Ultraviolet (UV) [18], Magnetic Field Imaging (MFI) [19], and Spectroscopic Diagnostic Techni-

ques (SDT) [20], along with classification techniques like Wavelet Transform and Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) [21], have been proposed. Deep Learning (DL) [22] has emerged as a promising approach for effectively identifying defects in solar panels, defect visibility, and efficient localization. Our survey of related models concerning solar panel defect detection revealed that RGB images are not suitable for the visibility of defects [23]. This is why nondestructive detection techniques, such as IRT, LIT, etc., are applied before the object detection process. These techniques ensure enhanced facilitating more accurate defect detection and classification.

Table 1. Type of defects in solar modules caused by the manufacturer, environmental conditions, and users.

No	Defect Type	Causes
1	Hotspot [6]	Extreme Temperature
2	Broken glass [8]	Hail or collisions
3	Dust Build up	Strong wind or dust accumulation
4	Cracked back sheets	Collision or other harsh environmental conditions
5	Ribbon Discoloration	Corrosion, heat, or moisture exposure
6	Encapsulant Discoloration	UV light exposure, high temperature, and humidity
7	Delamination	Manufacturing, installation issues, Environmental conditions, etc.
8	Bubbles	Inadequate heating and moisture or contaminants
9	Defective Junction box [24]	Faulty connections
10	Potential Induced Degradation (PID)	Exposure to high temperatures and humidity

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positional embedding, also referred to as “queries,” are then passed as inputs to the transformer block encoder, as shown in Figure 3.

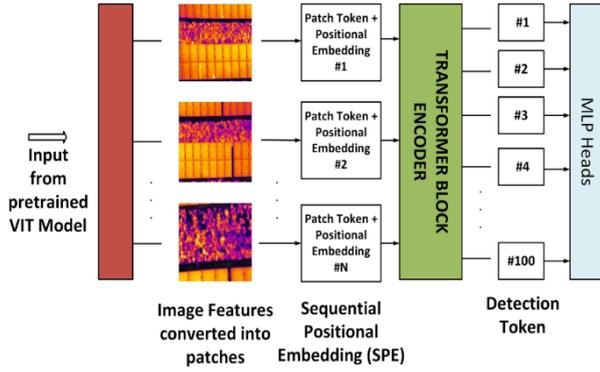


Figure 3. A diagram of the YOLOS model on object detection for solar images

The pre-trained ViT model used in YOLOS is adapted from the transformer architecture and was initially designed for natural language processing and visual data processing. It divides an input image into a sequence of smaller patches, linearly embeds them, and passes them through multiple layers of self-attention mechanisms to capture relationships between patches. The ViT model used in YOLOS has been pre-trained on large datasets such as ImageNet, which consists of over 14 million images. This pre-training allows it to learn general visual features and patterns, making it effective for various downstream tasks. The Multilayer Perceptron (MLP) heads help to fuse the detection token produced from the output of the transformer encoder to give the defect classification and bounding box predictions [44]. Figure 4. shows the overall system, including the pre-trained ViT module. The matching process of the objects uses the following global loss function,

$$\mathcal{L}_{YOLOS} = \lambda_{loc} \mathcal{L}_{loc} + \lambda_{obj} \mathcal{L}_{obj} + \lambda_{cls} \mathcal{L}_{cls} \quad (1)$$

where λ_{loc} , λ_{obj} , λ_{cls} and represent the weights assigned to the localization, objectness, and classification loss terms, respectively. \mathcal{L}_{loc} measures the error of the predicted bounding box locations, \mathcal{L}_{obj} measures the error of the predicted object, and \mathcal{L}_{cls} measures the error of the predicted class label.

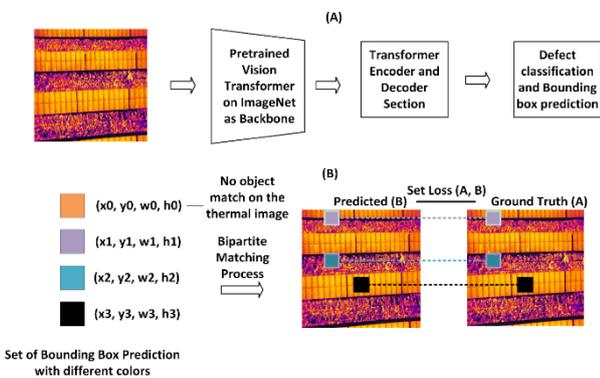


Figure 4. The overall detection system with the ViT module.

The commonly used Intersection over Union (IoU) loss is a measure of dissimilarity between two bounding

boxes. Let B_{pred} be the predicted bounding box and B_{gt} be the ground truth bounding box. The IoU of B_{pred} and B_{gt} is defined as:

$$IoU(B_{pred}, B_{gt}) = \frac{(B_{pred} \cap B_{gt})}{(B_{pred} \cup B_{gt})} \quad (2)$$

where $B_{pred} \cap B_{gt}$ is the overlapped area of these two boxes, as exhibited with the shaded rectangle in the left panel of Figure 4. Meanwhile, $B_{pred} \cup B_{gt}$ is the union of these two bounding boxes, as shown in the right panel of Figure 5. However, IoU is zero when no overlapping area exists between B_{pred} and B_{gt} . See Figure 5 for example. Therefore, we have modified IoU to a more general metric Generalized IoU (GIoU) as follows,

$$GIoU(B_{pred}, B_{gt}) = IoU(B_{pred}, B_{gt}) - \frac{(en - box(B_{pred}, B_{gt}) - B_{pred} \cup B_{gt})}{en - box(B_{pred}, B_{gt})} \quad (3)$$

where $en - box(B_{pred}, B_{gt})$ is the smallest bounding box enclosing both B_{pred} and B_{gt} . The GIoU metric considers both overlap and structural differences between the two areas as it adds structural similarity to the overlap measurement IoU, as shown in Figure 6. The total GIoU loss for all N objects in an image can be expressed as follows,

$$GIoU Loss = \left(\frac{1}{N}\right) \sum_{i=1}^N (1 - GIoU(b_i, \hat{b}_i)) \quad (4)$$

Here, b_i is the ground truth bounding box for the i th object in the image, \hat{b}_i is the predicted bounding box for the object, $GIoU(b_i, \hat{b}_i)$ is the GIoU between b_i and \hat{b}_i .

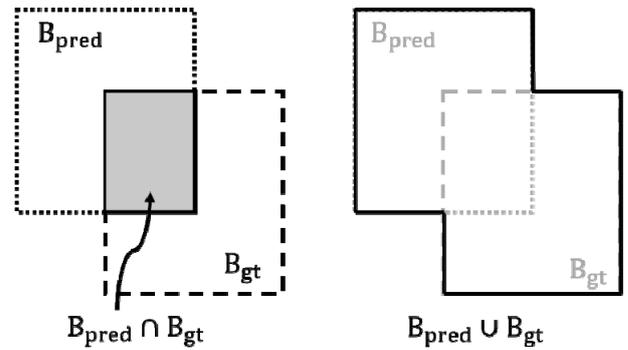


Figure 5. The overlapping, union, and the en-box of two bounding boxes

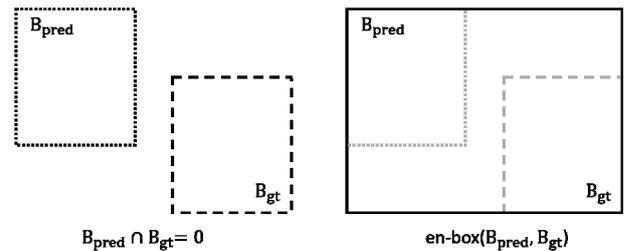


Figure 6. The overlapping, union, and the en-box of two bounding boxes.

The Detection Transformer (DETR) model is popularly known as End-to-End Object Detection with

Transformers [45]. It uses a unique loss function called Set Prediction Loss, which aims to solve the object detection problem as a set prediction task rather than a region proposal problem. The loss function includes two terms: Binary Cross-Entropy (BCE) Loss and Set Loss. BCE measures the loss for object predictions (whether an object is present in a particular class). In contrast, set loss measures the matching between predicted and ground-truth object sets using a bipartite matching process. The corresponding equation for the BCE loss is:

$$\text{Weighted } L_{\text{box}}(b_i, \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)}) = W_{\text{GloU}} \cdot \lambda_{\text{GloU}} \left(b_i, \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)} \right) + W_{l_1}^1 \cdot \lambda_l^1 \left\| b_i - \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)} \right\|_1 \quad (5)$$

where vector $y = [y_1, y_2, \dots, y_N]$ represents the ground truth binary labels (0 or 1) for the N samples, vector $\hat{y} = [\hat{y}_1, \hat{y}_2, \dots, \hat{y}_N]$ represents the predicted probabilities for the positive class, and $\log(\cdot)$ is the natural logarithm function. The Set Loss is given by:

$$\text{SetLoss}(A, B) = \text{BCELoss}(C(A)\hat{C}(B)) + \lambda \cdot L_{\text{box}}(L(A), \hat{L}(B)) \quad (6)$$

where A is the ground-truth object set, B is the predicted object set; $C(A)$ is the binary mask indicating the presence or absence of objects, $\hat{C}(B)$ is the predicted mask, $L(A)$ is the ground-truth bounding box location matrix, $\hat{L}(B)$ is the predicted matrix, and λ is a balancing hyperparameter. $L(A)$ and $\hat{L}(B)$ are matrix combinations of b_i and $\hat{b}_{\sigma(i)}$, respectively. L_{box} is a linear combination of GIoU and l_1 regression loss shown as follows,

$$L_{\text{box}}(b_i, \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)}) = \lambda \cdot \text{GIoU}(b_i, \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)}) + \lambda_{L_1} \left\| b_i - \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)} \right\|_1 \quad (7)$$

where b_i denotes the i -th object, and $\hat{b}_{\sigma(i)}$ denotes the prediction with the lowest cost from b_i in terms of Hungarian algorithm-based matching loss [45]. $\Lambda_{\text{GloU}} \in R$ and $\Lambda_{L_1} \in R$ are hyperparameters that control the weighting of the GIoU Loss component and the l_1 regression loss in the overall loss function. The authors of DETR suggested $\lambda_{\text{GloU}} = 5$ and $\lambda_{L_1} = 1$, [46]. Notation $\left\| b_i - \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)} \right\|_1$ denotes the l_1 norm. The losses are normalized by the number of objects in the batch.

l_1 loss in YOLOs Models

In YOLOs, the l_1 loss is used to measure the difference between the predicted bounding box coordinates and the ground-truth bounding box coordinates. Suppose we have N ground-truth objects in an image; then the predicted bounding box coordinates and sizes for each of these objects are denoted as (x_i, y_i, w_i, h_i) , $i = 1, 2,$

\dots, N , where coordinate (x_i, y_i) denotes the center of the i -th box, and the pair (w_i, h_i) hi represent the width and height of the same box, respectively. Similarly, the ground-truth bounding box coordinates and sizes are denoted as $(x_{i0}, y_{i0}, w_{i0}, h_{i0})$. The l_1 loss for a single object i is defined as the sum of the absolute differences between the predicted and ground-truth bounding box coordinates and sizes:

$$L_{l_1}(i) = |x_i - x_{i0}| + |y_i - y_{i0}| + |w_i - w_{i0}| + |h_i - h_{i0}| \quad (8)$$

The total l_1 loss for all N objects in an image is obtained by summing up the loss over all objects.

$$L_{l_1} = \sum_{i=1}^N L_{l_1}(i) \quad (9)$$

Weighted GIoU and l_1 losses for YOLOs-PV

A linear combination of GIoU and l_1 losses in equation (7) is inefficient for some problems. This was proposed by [46] to solve the problem of different scales for small and large boxes, even if their relative errors were similar. However, defect localization in the solar panels using the YOLOs algorithm with the linear combination of losses results in ineffective bounding box predictions of the defects during the inference. This sometimes results in overlapping of the bounding boxes of different class scores on the same object. However, using a weighted loss combination ensures assigning more priority to any of the GIoU or l_1 loss, which helps suppress an unwanted bounding box loss. We introduce two hyperparameters, i.e., W_{GloU} and W_{l_1} , as the weights of GIoU Loss and l_1 -Loss, respectively,

$$\text{FinalWeightLoss} = W_{\text{GloU}} \cdot \text{GIoULoss} + W_{l_1} \cdot L_{l_1} \quad (10)$$

where the sum of W_{l_1} and W_{GloU} is always equal to 1. Rewriting the equation yields:

$$\text{Weighted } L_{\text{box}}(b_i, \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)}) = W_{\text{GloU}} \cdot \lambda_{\text{GloU}} \left(b_i, \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)} \right) + W_{l_1}^1 \cdot \lambda_l^1 \left\| b_i - \hat{b}_{\sigma(i)} \right\|_1 \quad (11)$$

3. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

3.1 Solar Panel Defect Localization Results

Before discussing the results, we will briefly explain the performance measures that we have used. In object detection, Mean Average Precision (mAP) is used as an algorithm performance measure. Precision measures how accurate the algorithm's predictions are. i.e., the number of correct detections that the system finds (true positive) is divided by the total number of detections that the system finds (true positive + false positive). Object detection systems make predictions in terms of a bounding box of the detected object. For each bounding box, we measure an overlap (intersection) between the predicted bounding box and the ground truth bounding box. This is used by the IoU explained above. A threshold value is pre-selected; if the IoU exceeds this specified value, it leads to a true object being detected. The mAP is calculated by taking the mean AP over all IoU thresholds.

Another important performance measure is the Recall. It measures how well the system finds all positives, i.e., the number of correct detections that the system finds (true positive) divided by the total number of existing true objects (true positive+false negative). The Mean Average Recall (mAR) is the recall averaged over all IoU thresholds between 0.5 and 1.0. More details about the mAP and mAR and their calculations can be found in [47,48].

We experimented on the six YOLO variants including YOLOv5, YOLOv5-OBB, YOLOv6, YOLOv7, YOLOv8 and YOLOs for 100 epochs. The batch size is 16, the image resolution is 640, the learning rate is $2.5e-5$, and the weight decay is $1e-4$. The experimental results are displayed in Table 3, where symbol + indicates that the model is used on a different dataset. The results show the transformer-based YOLOs algorithm has better mAP@0.5:0.95 of the value 0.867 and mAR@0.5:0.95 of the value 0.952. The metric mAP@0.5 measures the average precision when the IoU threshold is set to 0.50, while mAP@0.5:0.95 measures the average precision when the IoU threshold is varied from 0.50 to 0.95 with a step of 0.05. The range specifies that the AP is calculated at ten different IoU thresholds, ranging from 0.50 to 0.95. A value of 1.0 for mAP@0.5 indicates perfect performance, while a 0.0 means the model fails to detect any defects. In our case, we got a value of 0.867, which indicates that YOLOs can detect around 86.70% of the defects in the test set correctly out of the ten different IoU thresholds.

Table 3. Experimental results of YOLO variants on object detection.

Models	Precision	Recall	mAR @0.5:0.95	mAP @0.5	mAP @0.5:0.95
Tommaso (Yolov3) [29]+	-	-	-	0.700	-
Zhu (TPH-YOLOv5) [31]+	-	-	-	-	0.394
Pathak (faster RCNN) [33]+	-	-	-	-	0.670
Sun (YOLOv5) [34] +	-	-	0.890	-	0.878
YOLOv5 [35]	0.692	0.491	-	0.511	0.258
YOLOv5-OBB [35]	0.637	0.371	-	0.411	0.153
YOLOv6 [36]	-	-	0.835	0.483	0.767
YOLOv7 [37]	0.805	0.769	-	0.796	0.370
YOLOv8 [38]	0.715	0.691	-	0.752	0.463
YOLOS [39]	-	-	0.952*	0.335	0.867
YOLOS-PV (Ours)*	-	-	0.952*	0.335	0.894*

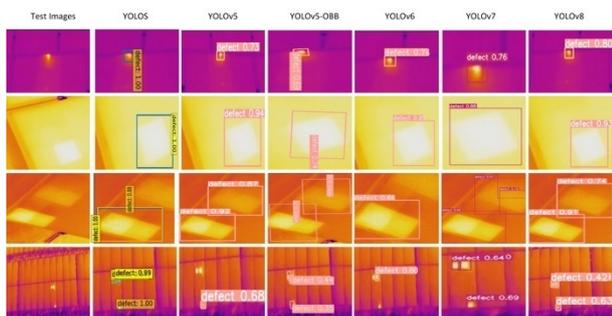


Figure 7. Inference experimental results on solar thermal images using six YOLO variants.

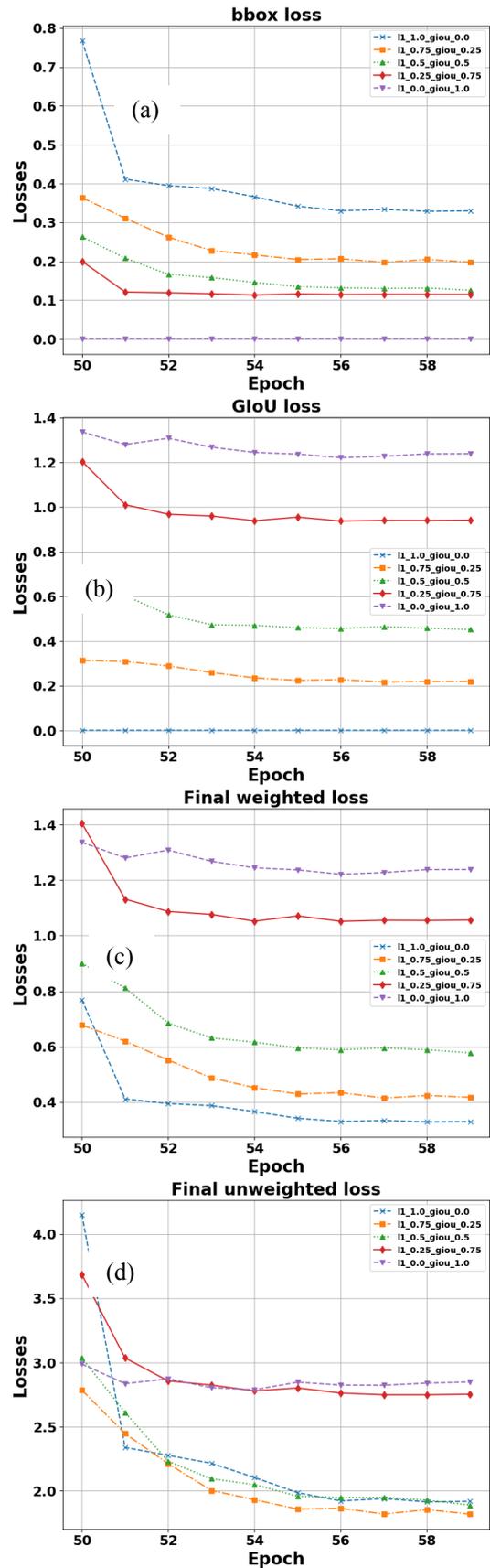


Figure 8. Results of varying the weighted hyperparameters of W_{l1} AND W_{GIoU} with the l_1 and giou loss for the defects localization in solar thermal images. a weight of $l_1 = 0.250$ and $giou = 0.750$ gives a better loss combination for the selected learning rate of $2.5e-5$. this gives a final giou loss of 0.970, a final weight loss of 1.100 during training, and a test loss value of 2.890 within the 10 epochs window from 50 to 59 epoch.

Similarly, we evaluate each model on the inference dataset as shown in Figure 7. The figure shows four rows of different input IR images (left) and the results of defects detections by the 6 YOLO variants. For each algorithm the figure shows the detected objects (in this case it is the defects), the bounding box, and the confidence score of the detection. The performance of each model is zoomed-in for a better score display. One can easily observe that the YOLOS transformer model has confidence levels close to 1.0 for most detected defects compared to the other variants. It is concluded that the YOLOS model has better inference performance but with overlapping bounding box prediction in some cases.

3.2 YOLOS-PV weighted loss results

In this section, we implemented the proposed YOLOS-PV method on the same dataset used in the previous experiment. We vary the values of the weights W_{l_1} and W_{GIoU} from 0 to 1 in steps of 0.25 while both weights added to 1. We evaluate our results in a window of 10 epochs from 50 to 59 epochs. The results, as visualized in Figure 8, show that for the problem of localizing defects in solar thermal images, the best combination of the effective weight is $W_{l_1} = 0.25$ and $W_{GIoU} = 0.75$.

According to [49], the combination above results in a suitable learning rate as compared with other combinations. The most similar combination is $W_{l_1} = 1$ and $W_{GIoU} = 0$, which totally shuts down the effect of GIoU loss. However, this means that the bounding boxes overlap even more and the effect of the GIoU loss is removed. Since GIoU loss helps measure the dissimilarity between two bounding boxes and consider the overlap, we selected the 0.25 and 0.75 weight combinations for the YOLOS-PV model. This configuration is then trained on the images with the same hyperparameters chosen for the other models. This improves the $mAP@0.5:0.95$ to 0.894 as shown in Table 3.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we introduced the YOLOS-PV model, which is based on the transformer YOLOS model. Initially, we applied six state-of-the-art YOLO variants, i.e., YOLOv5, YOLOv5-OB, YOLOv6, YOLOv7, YOLOv8, and YOLOS, to localize defect class objects on the solar panels. Among these models, the YOLOS model demonstrated superior performance with a $mAP@0.5:0.95$ score of 0.867. To enhance the localization and bounding box prediction accuracy of solar thermal images, we proposed YOLOS-PV by introducing hyperparameter weighted values to the linear combination of bounding box loss, comprising l_1 regression loss and GIoU loss. This approach grants us greater control in adjusting the effectiveness of the loss function. Through experimentation, we determined that setting $W_{l_1} = 0.250$ and $W_{GIoU} = 0.750$ yielded optimal weight combinations for defect localization in solar thermal images.

5. FUTURE DIRECTION

One potential area for improvement is to further study the variation of defects in different solar panel plants,

such as hotspots, diodes, and junctions unlike using one class. This would require collaboration with the industry to obtain more accurate and comprehensive data, which can be used to refine the algorithms and improve the detection performance. Another area for improvement is the optimization of the weight values of l_1 and GIoU during training, using optimization techniques such as gradient descent. This can potentially lead to better localization accuracy and faster convergence during training. Finally, an interesting future direction would be to apply and fine-tune the weights hyperparameters to other domains apart from defect classification of solar thermal images, which could include other types of imaging modalities or even non-imaging data. This would require further research and experimentation to determine the applicability and effectiveness of the transformer-based YOLOS-PV algorithm in different domains.

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**НОВА ФУНКЦИЈА ТРОШКОВА ЗА YOLO
АЛГОРИТАМ ЗАСНОВАН НА ТРАНС-
ФОРМАТОРУ ЗА ОТКРИВАЊЕ ДЕФЕКТА
ФОТОНАПОНСКИХ ПАНЕЛА**

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С. Рехман**

Дефекти соларног панела могу довести до значајног губитка ефикасности и повећаних трошкова одржавања. Конвенционалне методе откривања кварова су често споре и неефикасне. Ова студија поново разматра алгоритам You Only Look Once (YOLO) и његове варијације, процењујући њихову ефикасност у идентификацији недостатака у термичким сликама соларних панела. Након тога, представљамо нови YOLO алгоритам, назван YOLOS-PV, изграђен на YOLO алгоритму заснованом на трансформатору. Предложени алгоритам уводи тежине функције нових губитака да би одредио приоритет локализованих објеката и визуелизовао мапу пажње сваке главе трансформатора у оквиру YOLOS алгоритма. У експериментима, YOLOS-PV постиже mAP@0.5:0.95 резултат од 0.894, надмашујући ефикасност других YOLOS варијанти. Имплементација кода се може наћи овде: [tella26/IOLOS-PV \(github.com\)](https://github.com/tella26/IOLOS-PV).