Downscaling of satellite-based air quality map using ai/ml

A FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Submitted by

Shivansh Sharma 12106075

Alla Krishna Sai Reddy 12115551

Gaurav Sureshrao Gapak 12115971

in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree

of

Bachelor of Technology

IN

Computer science & engineering

Lovely Professional University, Punjab

2025

1. Abstract

Air quality monitoring is crucial for environmental health and policy-making. Satellite data provides broad spatial coverage but often lacks the spatial resolution required for city-level analysis. This project aims to downscale coarse satellite-based air quality maps into high-resolution maps using deep learning. We used a basic Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) model to predict high-resolution air quality maps based on low-resolution inputs for PM2.5, NO_2, and SO_2 concentrations.

2. Keywords

Air Quality, Downscaling, CNN, PM2.5, NO_2, SO_2, Super-resolution, Satellite Data, Deep Learning

3. Introduction

Satellite data provides valuable information on air pollutants over large regions. However, its spatial resolution is often insufficient for city or neighborhood-level insights. To address this, we explore deep learning methods to increase the resolution of air quality maps — a process known as **downscaling** or **super-resolution**. The objective is to improve the utility of satellite data for urban planning and environmental monitoring by using CNNs to enhance spatial resolution. Air pollution poses a significant threat to human health and the environment. With the rise in urbanization and industrial activities, there has been an alarming increase in the concentration of harmful pollutants like **Particulate Matter (PM2.5)**, **Nitrogen Dioxide (NO_2)**, and **Sulfur Dioxide (SO_2)** in the atmosphere. Monitoring and managing these pollutants is critical for mitigating health risks, implementing pollution control strategies, and complying with environmental regulations.

Ground-based air quality monitoring stations provide accurate pollutant readings, but their spatial coverage is limited due to high installation and maintenance costs. In contrast, **satellite-based remote sensing** offers broader geographical coverage and can provide atmospheric data over regions where ground stations are absent. However, a significant drawback of satellite-based measurements is their **low spatial resolution**, which limits their applicability for localized analysis such as neighbourhood or street-level pollution estimation.

To bridge this gap, this project explores the application of **deep learning-based downscaling techniques** to improve the spatial resolution of satellite-derived air quality data. Downscaling, in this context, refers to the process of transforming **coarse-resolution data** into **fine-resolution outputs**, allowing us to generate detailed pollution maps suitable for city-level planning and health impact assessment.

The focus of this study is to develop a **Convolutional Neural Network (CNN)** model that takes in low-resolution air quality maps as input and predicts corresponding high-resolution maps. The approach is inspired by **image super-resolution techniques** in computer vision, where deep neural networks are used to enhance image clarity. In our case, each pollutant (PM2.5, NO_2, SO_2) is treated as a separate channel, similar to the RGB channels of an image, forming a **multichannel input** that the CNN model learns from.

Through this project, we aim to:

- Create synthetic datasets simulating low- and high-resolution maps based on real-world data.
- Train a basic CNN model to learn spatial pollutant patterns and correlations.
- Evaluate the model's ability to reconstruct high-resolution maps for multiple pollutants simultaneously.

By leveraging deep learning for air quality map enhancement, this work contributes to the broader goal of democratizing access to fine-grained environmental data, ultimately enabling smarter, data-driven decisions in the fields of public health, urban planning, and environmental protection.

4. Dataset Description

- **Source:** Kaggle: India Air Quality Data
- **Pollutants Used:** PM2.5, NO_2, SO_2
- **Cities Focused:** Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Kolkata, Bhubaneswar
- **Format:**
    - CSV file containing pollutant concentration data with timestamps and locations.
    - HDF5 (H5) files used to simulate high-resolution and low-resolution grid maps.

5. Data Preprocessing

- Filtered top cities with maximum PM2.5, NO_2, SO_2 records.
- Created artificial low-res (2×2) and high-res (4×4) pollutant grids per city per day.
- Normalized values between 0 and 1.
- Created training samples as multi-channel images (e.g., shape: (4, 4, 3)).

6. Methodology

This project aims to improve the spatial resolution of satellite-based air quality data using a basic Convolutional Neural Network (CNN). The pollutants focused on are PM2.5, NO_2, and SO_2, which are handled as separate input channels. The methodology involves data preparation, preprocessing, model design, training, and evaluation.

6.1 Data Collection and Sources

- Primary Dataset: We used the india-air-quality-data dataset from Kaggle, which contains ground station data on pollutants including PM2.5, NO_2, and SO_2 across multiple Indian cities over several years.
- Supplementary Satellite Data: While real satellite raster data is ideal for downscaling, we simulated low-resolution maps using the ground data by aggregating pollutant values over artificial grids, due to the absence of direct high-resolution satellite images.

6.2 Data Preprocessing

- City Selection: We filtered cities with the highest number of valid PM2.5, NO_2, and SO_2 entries. These included Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Bhubaneswar, and Kolkata.
- Date Filtering: We selected dates with a minimum number of complete pollutant readings (i.e., all three values present) across the selected cities.
- Spatial Mapping: Each pollutant value for a city on a given date was mapped to a spatial grid position (simulating a pixel in a low-resolution satellite image).
- Grid Formation:
    - Each map was represented as a 3×8×8 tensor — where 3 represents pollutant channels (PM2.5, NO_2, SO_2), and 8×8 is the grid size.
    - We created low-resolution versions (4×4) by downsampling the high-resolution tensors using bicubic interpolation.

6.3 Dataset Preparation

- Input (X): Low-resolution air quality maps (4×4×3).
- Target (Y): Corresponding high-resolution maps (8×8×3).
- Train-Validation Split: The dataset was split into training (80%) and validation (20%) sets, ensuring city and date diversity.

6.4 CNN Model Design

A basic Convolutional Neural Network was designed for super-resolution. The architecture includes:

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Input: (4, 4, 3) — Low-res map with 3 pollutant channels

1. Conv2D (filters=64, kernel_size=3×3, activation='relu', padding='same')
2. UpSampling2D (size=2×2) — Upscales to 8×8
3. Conv2D (filters=32, kernel_size=3×3, activation='relu', padding='same')
4. Conv2D (filters=3, kernel_size=3×3, activation='linear', padding='same') — Outputs 8×8×3 map

Output: (8, 8, 3) — High-res map with downscaled pollutants

- Loss Function: Mean Squared Error (MSE)
- Optimizer: Adam (learning rate: 0.001)
- Metrics: Mean Absolute Error (MAE)

6.5 Training

- Epochs: 50
- Batch Size: 8
- The model was trained using the prepared dataset. During training, both loss and validation metrics were monitored.

6.6 Evaluation and Visualization

- Loss Analysis: The model achieved low MSE and MAE values, indicating good performance in reconstructing high-resolution maps.
- Visual Comparison: Sample predictions were visualized using heatmaps to compare:
  - Low-resolution input maps
  - Model-generated high-resolution outputs
  - Ground truth high-resolution maps

This comparison confirmed the CNN’s ability to capture spatial variations and produce sharper, finer air quality distributions.

6.7 Multichannel Extension

- Unlike most air quality downscaling works which focus on PM2.5 only, this project simultaneously downscales PM2.5, NO_2, and SO_2, treating them as three channels.
- This multichannel approach allows the model to learn inter-pollutant relationships and improve reconstruction accuracy.

6.8 Qualitative Evaluation

The output includes:

- **Low-Resolution Input**: A coarse grid with general pollution trends.
- **Predicted High-Resolution Output**: Sharper details with spatial pollutant variation.
- **Actual High-Resolution Target**: Ground truth comparison for visual inspection.

The model predictions closely resemble actual high-res data.

7. Further Work

While the current implementation of CNN-based multichannel air quality map downscaling provides promising results, several improvements and extensions can be explored in future work:

7.1 Integration with Real Satellite Data

- The current approach uses simulated grids due to the lack of high-resolution satellite images.
- Future work can integrate actual satellite data (e.g., from Sentinel-5P, MODIS, or OMI) as low-resolution inputs and ground station data as high-resolution ground truth for more realistic training.

7.2 Use of Advanced Deep Learning Models

- Advanced architectures like SRCNN, EDSR, UNet, or Transformer-based super-resolution models can be used to improve accuracy and spatial detail in predictions.
- These models can learn complex spatial patterns better than a basic CNN.

7.3 Temporal Modeling

- Incorporate time-series data to model the temporal trends in air quality using ConvLSTM, 3D CNN, or Transformer models.
- This would allow forecasting future high-resolution air quality maps based on past trends.

7.4 Inclusion of Meteorological and Geospatial Features

- Features like temperature, humidity, wind speed, population density, elevation, and land use can be added to improve model predictions.
- These factors have strong influence on pollutant dispersion and concentration.

7.5 Deployment as a Real-Time Tool

- The model can be turned into a web-based application that allows users (government bodies, researchers, citizens) to visualize predicted high-resolution pollution maps for any region based on satellite data.

8. Conclusion

In this project, we presented a deep learning-based approach for enhancing the spatial resolution of satellite-based air quality maps using a basic CNN model. Our method focused on three key pollutants — PM2.5, NO_2, and SO_2 — which were processed as multichannel input to the CNN model.

We successfully:

- Extracted, filtered, and prepared pollutant data from the Kaggle dataset,
- Created synthetic low- and high-resolution pollutant grids for training,
- Built and trained a CNN to learn the mapping between low- and high-resolution data,
- Evaluated the model and visualized its ability to reconstruct sharper pollutant distributions.

The model achieved low validation errors, indicating its capability to generate high-resolution maps from coarse input data. This approach lays the foundation for future deep learning systems that can utilize satellite imagery to estimate localized pollution levels in the absence of dense ground sensor networks.

By scaling and refining this methodology with real-world remote sensing data and advanced models, this work holds the potential to significantly aid in urban air quality monitoring, policy-making, and public health planning across regions with sparse monitoring infrastructure.

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