

The Impact of Variation Operators on the Performance of SMS-EMOA on the Bi-objective BBOB-2016 Test Suite

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ABSTRACT

The S-metric-Selection Evolutionary Multi-objective Optimization Algorithm (SMS-EMOA) is one of the best-known indicator-based multi-objective optimization algorithms. It employs the S-metric or hypervolume indicator in its (steady-state) selection by deleting in each iteration the solution that has the smallest contribution to the hypervolume indicator. In the SMS-EMOA, the conceptual idea is this hypervolume-based selection. Hence the algorithm can, for example, be combined with several variation operators. Here, we benchmark two versions of SMS-EMOA which employ differential evolution (DE) and simulated binary crossover (SBX) with polynomial mutation (PM) respectively on the newly introduced bi-objective `bbob-biobj` test suite of the Comparing Continuous Optimizers (COCO) platform. The results unsurprisingly reveal that the choice of the variation operator is crucial for performance with a clear advantage of the DE variant on almost all functions.

Keywords

Benchmarking, Black-box optimization, Bi-objective optimization

1. INTRODUCTION

Indicator-based algorithms constitute an important class of (stochastic) multi-objective optimization algorithms. The S-metric-Selection Evolutionary Multi-objective Optimization Algorithm (SMS-EMOA) [4] is among the best known multi-objective algorithms and as such rather an algorithm framework with a fixed environmental selection. It uses the so-called S-metric or hypervolume contribution or hypervolume indicator loss to assign a quality to each solution in its selection procedure but does not specify the variation operators used to create new candidate solutions. Note that the hypervolume loss selection criterion is, in more general forms, also used in other well-known algorithms such as

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the MO-CMA-ES [12] or HypE [3]. It is therefore natural to benchmark an algorithm with hypervolume-based selection on the recently proposed bi-objective `bbob-biobj` test suite [15] of the Comparing Continuous Optimizers platform (COCO, [10]) and to investigate the impact of different variation operators on the algorithm's performance.

2. ALGORITHM PRESENTATION

The main functionality of the SMS-EMOA is summarized in the pseudo code of Algorithm 1. After a random population initialization, the algorithm performs iteration-wise the following steps until the total budget is exhausted: First, a single new candidate solution is created from the current population via a to-be-specified variation operator and evaluated on the vector-valued objective function. Then, a non-dominated ranking [8] is performed on the population augmented by the new point. Within the solutions of worst rank, the hypervolume loss of each solution to this set is computed, i.e. the amount of hypervolume difference between the set of worst rank with and without this solution. Finally, the solution with the smallest hypervolume loss is deleted¹ and the next iteration starts. The hypervolume loss computation depends on the reference point of the hypervolume indicator, which is typically chosen *relative* to the current population in the SMS-EMOA. This makes its hypervolume-based selection unique from others with fixed reference point such as the ones in the MO-CMA-ES or HypE.

2.1 Algorithm Variants

In the following, we compare two SMS-EMOA variants that differ only in the variation operators used. On the one hand, we have SMS-EMOA with polynomial mutation (PM, [7]) and simulated binary crossover (SBX, [6]): we denote this variant by SMS-PM and abbreviate it further in the tables to PM. On the other hand, we have an SMS-EMOA variant that employs differential evolution [14] and that we call SMS-DE or DE for short. In addition, we display the performance of a pure random search within $[-5, 5]^n$ [1] as a baseline.

¹In practice, the computation of the hypervolume loss is skipped if only one solution with worst rank exists in the population.

Algorithm 1 Pseudocode of the SMS-EMOA framework with unspecified variation operator variate. The parameters of the algorithm are a benchmark problem `problem` including its dimension n , a population size `popsiz`, the lower bounds `lb` and upper bounds `ub` for each variable, and a `budget` in number of function evaluations.

```

1: procedure SMS-EMOA(problem,  $n$ , popsiz, lb, ub,
   budget)
2: Initialize the first popsiz solutions uniformly at ran-
   dom within  $[\text{lb}, \text{ub}]^n$  as  $P$ 
3:   while budget > COCOGetEvaluations(problem) do
4:      $y = \text{variate}(P)$ ;
5:     COCOEvaluateFunction(problem,  $x$ );
6:      $P' = P \cup \{y\}$ 
7:     Compute set  $W \subseteq P'$  of worst non-domination
8:         rank via non-dominated sorting
9:     For all  $x \in W$ , determine its hypervolume loss:
10:     $d(x) = I_H(W) - I_H(W \setminus \{x\})$ 
11:    Choose  $z \in W$  with smallest loss  $d(x)$  for removal:
12:     $P = P' \setminus \{z\}$ 
13:   end while
14: end procedure

```

2.2 Parameters

The two benchmarked variants of the SMS-EMOA use a fixed population size of 100 and a dynamic reference point $r = (r_1, r_2)$ for the hypervolume computation defined by $r_i = \max_{p \in W} f_i(p) + 1$ ($i \in \{1, 2\}$) where W is the current set of solutions with worst non-domination rank. The variant using simulated binary crossover and polynomial mutation applies the parameters $\eta_c = 15$ and $\eta_m = 20$. The crossover probability is set to 0.9, the swap probability to 0.5, and the mutation probability per component to $1/n$, where n denotes the problem’s input dimension. The DE variant applies the simple scheme, where one difference of two random solutions is added to a third one. The weight of the difference is set to $F = 0.2 + 0.6R$ with $R \in [0, 1]$ being sampled from a uniform random distribution. The crossover probability is set to $CR = 0.9$. Starting from a random index, only one block is used for the crossover. The length of the block is determined by sampling $R \in [0, 1]$ from a uniform random distribution until $R > CR$. No restarts are implemented.

3. CPU TIMING

In order to evaluate the CPU timing of the algorithm, we have run the two SMS-EMOA variants SMS-PM and SMS-DE, on the entire `bbob-biobj` test suite for $500 \cdot n$ function evaluations, i.e. for $5 \cdot n$ generations and a population size of 100. The Matlab code was run under Matlab 2008b on a Windows XP machine with Intel(R) Core(TM)2 Duo T9600 CPU 2.80GHz with 1 processor and 2 cores. The time per function evaluation over different dimensions is shown in Table 1. We observe that the dimension has almost no effect on the time per function evaluation for the algorithms tested and the relatively low budget of $500 \cdot n$ function evaluations. We also see slightly smaller times per function evaluation for the SMS-EMOA variant employing polynomial mutation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results from experiments according to [11], [9] and [5] on the benchmark functions given in [15] are presented in

Table 1: Results of CPU timing experiment in run-time per function evaluation (in 10^{-4} seconds) for the two SMS-EMOA variants, benchmarked here.

algorithm	time per function evaluation (in 10^{-4} s)					
	2-D	3-D	5-D	10-D	20-D	40-D
SMS-PM	5.8	5.8	5.6	5.6	5.6	5.7
SMS-DE	6.2	6.1	6.2	5.8	5.7	5.9

Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 and in Tables 2 and 3. The experiments were performed with COCO [10], version 1.0.1, the plots were produced with version 1.1.1.

The **average running time (aRT)**, used in the figures and tables, depends on a given quality indicator value, $I_{\text{target}} = I^{\text{ref}} + \Delta I$, and is computed over all relevant trials as the number of function evaluations executed during each trial while the best indicator value did not reach I_{target} , summed over all trials and divided by the number of trials that actually reached I_{target} [11, 13]. **Statistical significance** is tested with the rank-sum test for a given target I_{target} using, for each trial, either the number of needed function evaluations to reach I_{target} (inverted and multiplied by -1), or, if the target was not reached, the best ΔI -value achieved, measured only up to the smallest number of overall function evaluations for any unsuccessful trial under consideration.

Investigating the performance data in the shown figures and tables, results in the following general observations.

In an initial phase, both tested SMS-EMOA variants show a performance worse than the pure random search without reaching any (or just a few) hypervolume indicator targets in the first $100n$ function evaluations. This can be attributed to the fact that the pure random search is sampling within $[-5, 5]^n$ while the initial population of the SMS-EMOA variants is chosen uniformly at random within the much larger space $[-100, 100]^n$, see also [2], and thus their populations need more time to approach the Pareto set.

After this initial phase, SMS-PM is almost always better than SMS-DE in the beginning with the Attractive Sector/Different Powers function (f23) being the only exception in 10-D. The difference, however, is relatively small with function f12 (in 10-D) and the separable-moderate function group (in 5-D) showing the largest effects of a factor of around 2.

Slightly after this, SMS-DE takes over and is better in almost all functions with respect to the number of solved targets at the end of the run. The only exceptions in 10-D are the Sphere/sep. Ellipsoid function (f2) where SMS-PM stays better all the time, the sep. Ellipsoid/sep. Ellipsoid function (f11) where SMS-PM is taking over again around $4.45 \cdot 10^5 n$ function evaluations, and the sep. Ellipsoid/Sharp ridge (f14) on which both algos have equal performance after $10^3 n$ function evaluations. But also here, the difference between the algorithms is relatively small: only on the Sphere/Sphere (f1), the Sphere/Different Powers (f6), and the Attractive sector/Attractive sector (f20) functions are the proportions of solved target precisions in 10-D larger than 20% for some budgets.

With respect to the baseline random search, the SMS-EMOA variants are better for budgets larger than around $10^3 n$ on most functions, except for Sphere/sep. Ellipsoid (f2) and sep. Ellipsoid/sep. Ellipsoid (f11). But also for other

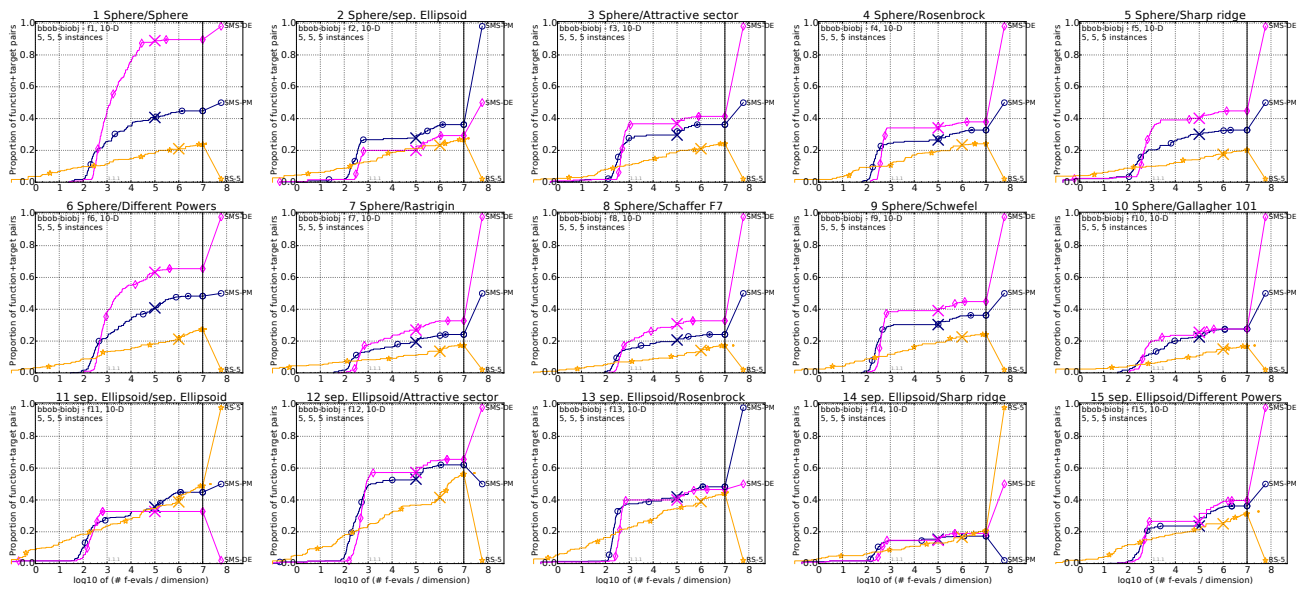


Figure 1: Bootstrapped empirical cumulative distribution of the number of objective function evaluations divided by dimension (FEvals/DIM) for 58 targets with target precision in $\{-10^{-4}, -10^{-4.2}, -10^{-4.4}, -10^{-4.6}, -10^{-4.8}, -10^{-5}, 0, 10^{-5}, 10^{-4.9}, 10^{-4.8}, \dots, 10^{-0.1}, 10^0\}$ for each single function f_1 to f_{15} in 10-D.

functions, the pure random search is expected to take over for larger budgets which is related to the fact that on many functions, the performance of the SMS-EMOA algorithms flattens out or even does not improve anymore at some point. This indicates that the algorithm has converged. Whether all solutions have arrived close to the Pareto set cannot be decided from the data, while we believe that this is not the case most of the time. Then, restarts will likely be beneficial in terms of the performance measure underlying the COCO platform, namely the hypervolume indicator of the archive of all non-dominated solutions found so far [5].

5. CONCLUSIONS

We have compared numerically two variants of the SMS-EMOA on the `bbob-biobj` test suite of the COCO platform. It turns out that the choice of the variation operators has a strong effect on the algorithm performance—with an advantage on almost all `bbob-biobj` test functions for the differential evolution variant over the polynomial mutation / simulated binary crossover version. This effect of the variation operator is expected to be present for other algorithms as well while its investigation is kept for future research.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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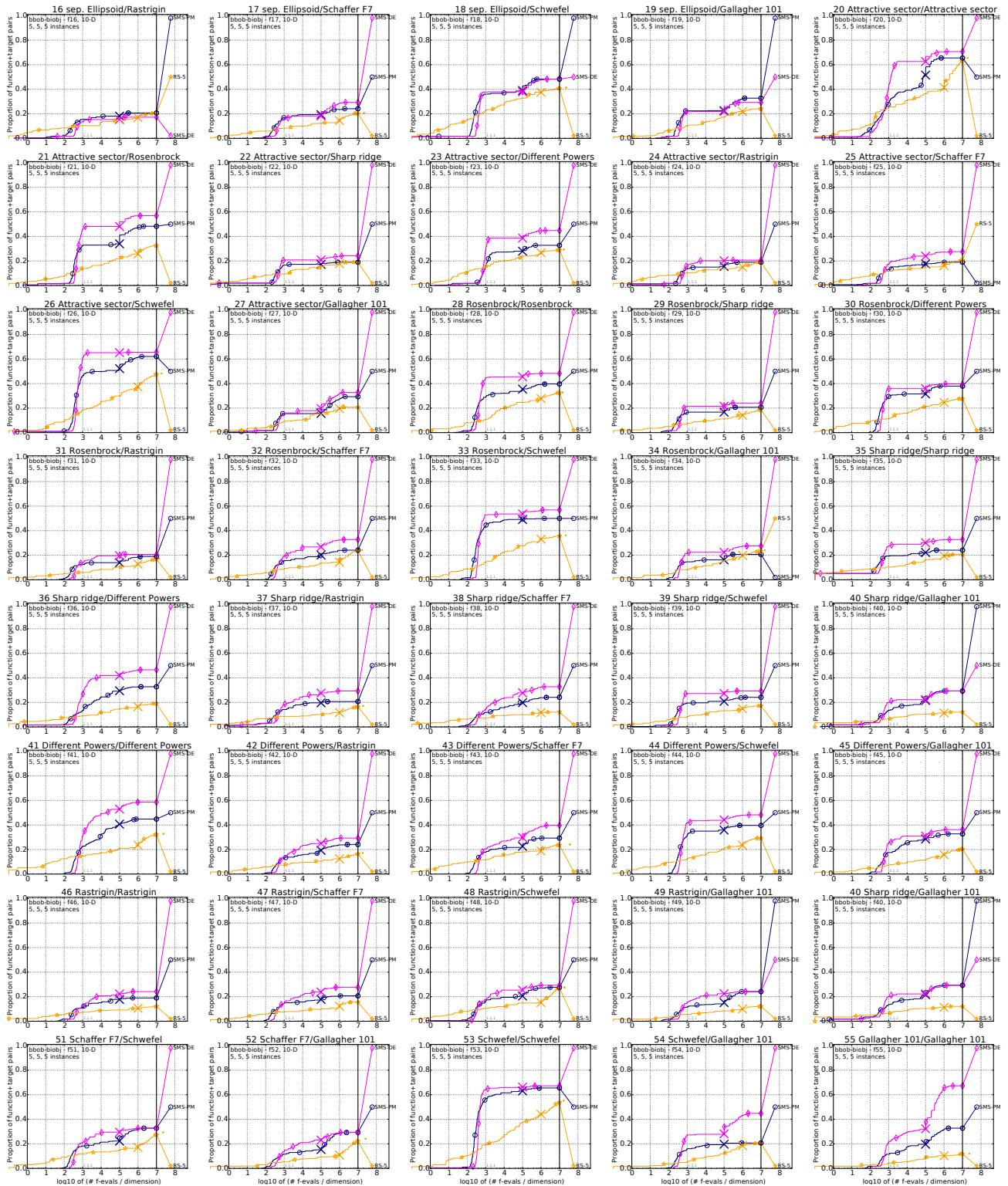


Figure 2: Bootstrapped empirical cumulative distribution of the number of objective function evaluations divided by dimension (FEvals/DIM) as in Fig. 1 but for functions f_{16} to f_{55} in 10-D.

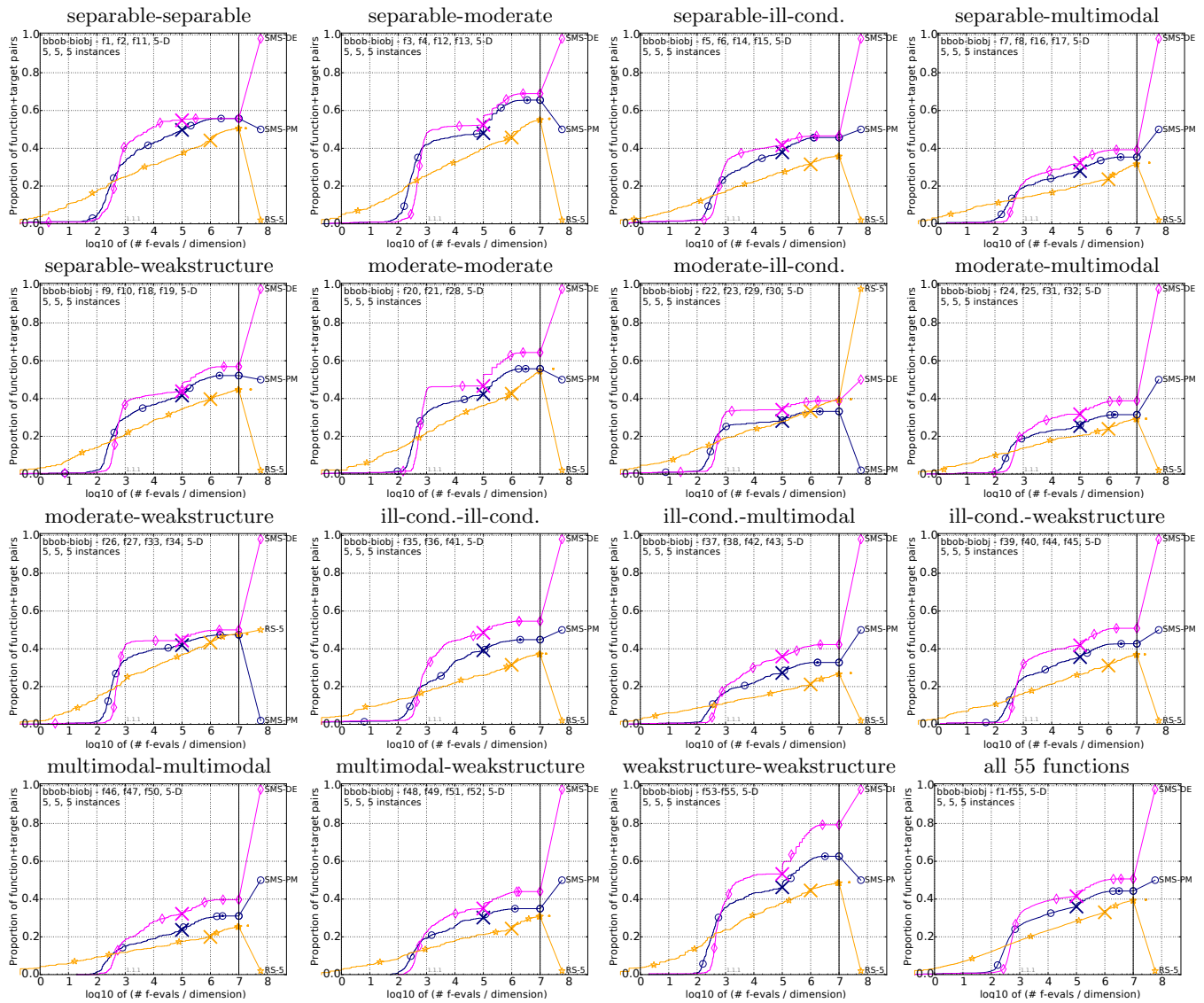


Figure 3: Bootstrapped empirical cumulative distribution of the number of objective function evaluations divided by dimension (FEvals/DIM) for 58 targets with target precision in $\{-10^{-4}, -10^{-4.2}, -10^{-4.4}, -10^{-4.6}, -10^{-4.8}, -10^{-5}, 0, 10^{-5}, 10^{-4.9}, 10^{-4.8}, \dots, 10^{-0.1}, 10^0\}$ for all functions and subgroups in 5-D.

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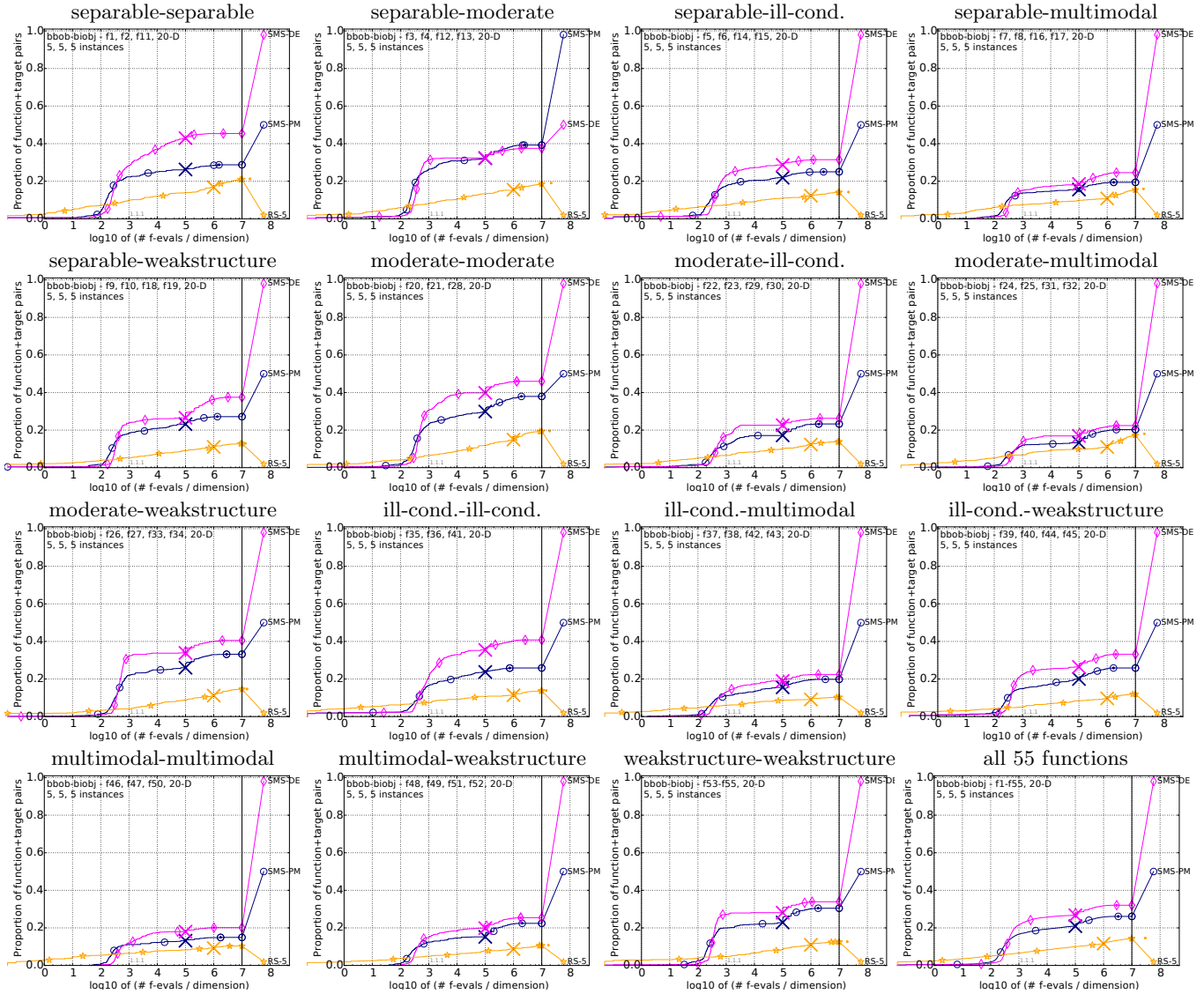


Figure 4: Bootstrapped empirical cumulative distribution of the number of objective function evaluations divided by dimension (FEvals/DIM) for 58 targets with target precision in $\{-10^{-4}, -10^{-4.2}, -10^{-4.4}, -10^{-4.6}, -10^{-4.8}, -10^{-5}, 0, 10^{-5}, 10^{-4.9}, 10^{-4.8}, \dots, 10^0\}$ for all functions and subgroups in 20-D.

