I believe every one has already heard the joke: what is the difference between testers and developers? Developers could learn programming, testers do not.

I have to admit. I was thinking in a similar way until 9 years ago we received a request from a user of our tool. She did not know how to design the architecture of her test system.

When we look at it …
This is the architecture of a test system.
The points are TTCN-3 and ASN.1 modules.
The lines are import statements connecting the modules.
Our project is part of a cooperation between Ericsson and the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

Personal pages of the authors:
http://compalg.inf.elte.hu/~attila/
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kristof_Szabados

The home page of the project:
http://compalg.inf.elte.hu/~attila/TestingAtScale.html
This is the architecture of a test system.
The points are TTCN-3 and ASN.1 modules.
The lines are import statements connecting the modules.

This network contains small world and scale-free properties.
If we select any 2 nodes, the shortest path between them will contain at most 5 other nodes.
The distribution of the connection follows the power law. Just like the Internet, the human brain and software systems.

Related publication:
We look at test system as software systems (that happen to be used for testing).
We are interested in the properties of test systems as software systems:
maintainability, reliability, performance, etc…

For this reason we have translated ISO 9126 and ISO 25010 software requirements for tests written in TTCN-3.

We looked at several tools analyzing software systems: FindBugs, FxCop, PMD, CheckStyle, etc…

We have defined and implemented 40+ code smells, covering all main categories of the ISO 9126 and ISO 25010 software quality standards.

Related publication:
We assumed that standard tests are of good quality.

We measured and categorized the internal quality of 16 applications in the telecom area.

On the above charts the column with marble texture denotes standardized TTCN-3 test systems.
As it can be seen we were already able to find some bad quality test systems.

Related publication:
Assuming that standardized test systems are of good quality might not be a good idea:

- We have found syntactical issues, where the TTCN-3 code did not follow the BNF of the TTCN-3 language.
- We have found semantical issues (the chart shows a bit string of 3 elements long getting twice a single character long value)

Related publication:

We also found hundreds, in some cases thousands of code smell instances. The most popular being:

- Magic strings and numbers
- Un-initialized local variables
- Unused global definitions
- Definitions that should be private, but are not set so

Related publication:

We also had some interesting observations on architectural level:

- Systems developed by ETSI look alike, systems developed by 3GPP look alike … but ETSI and 3GPP systems differ visibly
- ETSI developed test systems tend to contain modules that are not connected to the rest of the test system. While we have not seen this in any 3GPP test system.

Related publication:
To better understand the situation we translated the technical debt of the code smells, into Man-Hours.

Using the Delphi method, with the help of test developers and test system architects we have estimated the cost of fixing code smell types.

The slide shows a part of our measurements for all publicly available test systems from www.ttcn-3.org.

It can be seen that even if all code smell instances are the easiest to correct, the total cost of correction would be month in most of the test systems.

If they would the hardest to solve, the total technical debt would be years to solve.

Related publication:
We observed a 5 years period of the development of a large test system.
On the slide we show our measurement on the number of one of the code smells (others followed similar trends).

System-1 was developed for 3 years, System-2 for 1 year. At the end of 2012 they were merged, creating a new system (Generic).

It is visible that the merge increased the size of the system, and the number of issues in it. After the merge the development slowed down for a year. The growth followed an almost linear trend.

Several changes that had no effect on the quality of the system:
- Introduction of Agile, Scrum teams, Kanban teams.
- System architect leaving, creation of a system architect group, assigning a head system architect.
- Introduction of continuous integration
- The teams doubling the starting size.

Submitted publication
In some cases, we were able to see an effect on the quality.

On the above chart, we can see the effect of one tester taking one day to correct issues, and 2 hackathons/colorful days.
(One day events organized by developers with the only aim to correct code smells)

This is the first observation of the Lehman’s law on test systems as far as we know it:
- Law 2: “As an E-type system is evolved its complexity increases unless work is done to maintain or reduce it”
- Law 4: “Unless feedback mechanisms are appropriately adjusted, average effective global activity rate in an evolving E-type system tends to remain constant over product lifetime"

Submitted publication
We have implemented several layouts to visualize the architecture of test systems.
Unfortunately, the usual layouts generate visualizations are too hard to understand.

Publication under construction
We have found that in the case of test systems the most useful visualization could be a levelized one.

In this visualization nodes with no incoming or outgoing connections are extracted to the 0th level.
Node with only outgoing edges are listed on the 1th level.
On each further level we locate nodes that have incoming edges only from nodes on lower levels.

This visualization enables test systems architects to work efficiently, by answering the question: what should be checked next?

Publication under construction
We have observed dependency circles in the architecture of most of the test systems. These dependency circles usually point to architectural confusion in software systems.

We wished to see how the architecture of test systems looks like on higher abstraction levels, so we defined:

- A layout where modules are aggregated and represented by the folder they are located in, keeping the dependency of the modules.

- A layout where a package hierarchy is created based on the names of the modules (where _ and small/capital letter change).

On both abstraction levels we were able to observe circular dependency, in most of the test systems available from www.ttcn3.org
So far we have seen that test systems are built like software systems, into architectures seen in software systems and governed by laws applying to software systems.

We believe that test automation is the right way forward and we are on the right track now.

Although the current systems have several issues, this is because we know very little of them right now.

To be able to build better test systems in the future we must understand this aspect of testing in more detail.

More research is needed in this field, more test systems being studied.