

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Nikola Atanasov Venkov



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Date of birth 19.11.1981 | Nationality Bulgarian

POSITION

Research

POSTDOC POSITIONS

July 2020 – now

Researcher (Specialist) at the Society of Knowledge Division, IPS at BAS

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Science, Sofia, Bulgaria, <https://ips-bas.org/>

- Individual research project “Extending post-foundational discourse theory and applying it to research on the rise of populism and on propaganda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, 2021 – 2023.
- Other research on conspiracy theories, living-together, power and marginalisation in urban politics.

March 2019 – June 2019

Visiting scholar at Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography

Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde, Leipzig, Germany, <http://ifl-leipzig.de>

- Research and two lectures on the topic „Negotiating diversity in Sofia, Bulgaria, and the debate on geographies of encounter”.
- Collaboration with Senior Researcher Dr Karin Wiest and her research group on diversity at the margins of the postmigrant city.

March 2018 – February 2019

Fellow at The Centre for Advanced Studies Sofia

Centre for Advanced Studies Sofia, Bulgaria, <http://cas.bg>

- Research on the topic „Conviviality or Politics of Urban Coexistence? A Study on Exclusion and Solidarity at a Site of Diversity in the East-European City”.
- Academic seminar for an international scientific audience and a public lecture in the American Corner at the Sofia City Library.
- Publication in CAS Working Paper Series: “Conviviality vs. politics of coexistence: Going beyond the Global North” (forthcoming).

June 2011 – November 2011

Young scholar research grant for interdisciplinary urban studies

Research Centre for Social Science at the University of Sofia “Sv. Kliment Ohridski”, Bulgaria, <http://rcss.eu>

- As an independent researcher I developed a research concept, strategy and methodology and implemented a complete study. Resulting publications: Venkov, 2012a. Civil society and the Women’s Market, Sofia: RCSS. Venkov, 2012b. The citizens and the market. Discourses of an urban conflict. *Critique and humanism*, 39: 139-162.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Marginalisation and urban politics, Everyday multiculturalism in the post-socialist city, Exclusion of Roma, New populism, Conspiracy narratives, Essex School of Discourse Theory, Bourdieu, Engaged Anthropology

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**EDUCATION****2013 – 2017 PhD in Sociology**

University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Philosophy Faculty, Dept. of Sociology

- Successfully defended dissertation on the topic: “Gentrification of the Women’s Market: construction of urban policies and transformation of local relationships”.
- Published in both academic journals and the popular press (see Publications). Presented my work on both national and international conferences. Gave lectures to students, activists and architects. Did consultations and advocacy for the market’s local communities to civil society, grassroots movements, architects and politicians.
- 4-month Erasmus+ mobility in Kyev-Mohila Academy, Kiev, Ukraine, 10.III – 30.VI.2016. Contributed to the just established Centre for Urban Studies.

**2009 – 2012 MA in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology**

University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”, History Faculty, Dept. of Ethnology

- Graduated with distinction.
- Defended master thesis on the topic: “Gentrification or “Gypsification”? The struggle for the Women’s Market area in Sofia” after a year-long anthropological study.
- Participated in or undertook 4 research and training expeditions for fieldwork in Bulgaria and the Balkans.

**2004 – 2008 PhD in Mathematics**

University of Nottingham, School of Mathematical Sciences

- Worked in the area of Mathematical Neuroscience. More than ten presentations of my work at international conferences and schools in Europe and the USA.
- Defended dissertation on the topic “Dynamics of neural field equations”. Two publications in refereed journals.

**2000 – 2004 BSc in Applied Mathematics**

University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics

- Graduated with excellence.
- 6-month Erasmus mobility in University of Sheffield. There Nikola did research in Solar Magnetohydrodynamics with prof. Robert von Fay-Siebenburgen.

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**PROJECT WORK**

August – September 2020

**External expert, research on housing policy towards marginalised neighbourhoods in North-West Bulgaria for the World Bank**

Open Society Sofia, <https://osis.bg/>

- Conducting focus groups with local residents and interviews with municipal administration and activists from local NGOs in the cities of Lom and Montana.

**Business or sector:** Research and consultancy

March – May 2020

**Lead researcher of a sociological survey of marginalised neighbourhoods during the pandemic**

Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives, <http://www.bili-bg.org/>

- Design of survey for 200 respondents in the districts of Stolipinovo (Plovdiv) and Fakulteta (Sofia)

on the lockdown experience of residents.

- Training and oversight of interviewers, collating and analysis of data, final report.

**Business or sector:** Research and consultancy

November 2019 – October 2020

### Social anthropologist with the „Duvarmuzei” project – creating and sustaining a cultural space of expression in an excluded community

Duvarkolektiv (Hannah Oswald-Rose, contemporary artist, Nikola Venkov, anthropologist, and Ianka Simova, member of the community, unemployed), <https://duvarkolektiv.art.blog/>. Project won funding by Bulgarian National Cultural Fund

- Design of methodology, implementation of a participative process for collaborative creation, expression and self-representation to take place in a deprived and socially excluded Turkish & Roma community from Stolipinovo, Plovdiv. Supporting an intervention of creating a space for community-building through artistic means.
- Coordinator and logistics of exhibitions and events in the local community and the wider city community.

**Business or sector:** Arts and social intervention

November 2018 – October 2019

### Social anthropologist with „The Beauty We Share” project – socially engaged art co-created with families in an excluded community

Duvarkolektiv, <https://duvarkolektiv.art.blog/>. Project funded by Bulgarian National Cultural Fund

- Provided consultancy, mediation and support for the artist’s long-term collaborative work with minority families living in deprivation in Stolipinovo, Plovdiv.
- Process documentation and authoring a guide on the methodology developed.

**Business or sector:** Arts and social intervention

March 2018 – February 2019

### Social anthropologist with Mobile School Stolipinovo

Discovered Spaces, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, <http://discovered-spaces.org/>  
Architectural Workshop for Children, Sofia, Bulgaria, <http://archforchildren.com/>

- Community relations and mediation for an educational intervention in a marginalised community, including with children without access to school and no knowledge of Bulgarian (weekly street workshops).
- Collaborated on devising the intervention methodology and plan.

**Business or sector:** Education and social intervention

June 2017 – September 2017

### Lead researcher for a sociological survey of Stolipinovo neighbourhood

Swiss-Bulgarian Cooperation Program - Program for the Promotion of Social Inclusion of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups, <http://www.zovprogramme.bg/en>, Municipal foundation Plovdiv 2019, <http://plovdiv2019.eu/en>, Municipality of Plovdiv

- Consultant and coordinator for a large-scale survey of Stolipinovo, concerning demographics, health, education and living standards (8 on-field interviewers, 435 households surveyed, 50 items per interview).
- Collated gathered data, devised statistical analyses and final report. Recommendations for the next phases of the Bulgarian-Swiss Program’s project.

**Business or sector:** Research and consultancy

July 2016 – December 2016

### Head of ethnographic research about life of communities in Stolipinovo

Municipal foundation Plovdiv 2019 – European Capital of Culture, <http://plovdiv2019.eu/en>

- Expert in social anthropology and fieldwork in a long-term project for qualitative research in the largest Roma and Turkish neighbourhood in Bulgaria.
- Design, planning and coordination of the research of a team of four fieldworkers.
- Preparation of a book giving voice to the residents of Stolipinovo for wide Bulgarian audience.
- Preparation of an English-language Guide for artists working in marginalised communities, and Stolipinovo in particular
- Co-organisers with Plovdiv 2019 of a 5-day workshop „BuildUp with the Communities”. Me and

my team offered a program introducing artistic partners to the specific context of Stolipinovo and its needs, to methods for work in such community, to fieldwork exercises. We evaluated and gave feedback on proposed participants' projects. September 2016.

**Business or sector:** Research and consultancy

August 2015 – October 2015

### Fieldworker – study of entrepreneurial practices in Stolipinovo

Collective for Social Interventions, Sofia, Bulgaria, <http://koibooks.novilevi.org>

- Fieldwork and interviews with micro entrepreneurs in Stolipinovo for the research project “Entrepreneurial spirit and ghost entrepreneurs: Expert knowledge, neoliberal governance and social suffering”

**Business or sector:** Research and academia

July 2014 – September 2014

### Expert, stakeholder survey for an urban planning commission – redevelopment of a municipal market

Municipality of Sofia and Architectural Studio “Architectonika”, Sofia

- Qualitative survey of stakeholders concerning future redevelopment of a municipal market “Rimska Stena” in Sofia
- Report and communication of findings to the local communities planners and city administration
- Developed a comprehensive vision for governance of municipal markets in Sofia

**Business or sector:** Research and consultancy

April 2013 – June 2014

### Coordinator and anthropologist for art-initiative “The Unseen Women’s Market”

Self-organised voluntary initiative, <http://jenskipazar.eu>

- Developed the concept, brought together a team of 8 artists and professionals and started off the initiative.
- Organised 4-day workshop for a group of 15 young volunteers for research-artistic work in a community,
- Coordinated artists' work, support them with local and theoretical insight, community relations and follow up on the ethics of their process. Developed the unifying concept and established partnerships.

**Business or sector:** Arts and social intervention

November 2011 – February 2013

### Coordinator of volunteer group for educational work with Roma children

The Ideas Factory Association, Sofia, Bulgaria, <http://ideasfactorybg.org>

- As a participant in the volunteer group I conducted twice weekly lessons through play supporting Roma and Turkish kids ages 6 to 14. Initially as support for the local 13<sup>th</sup> School at the Women’s Market and later independently.
- Coordinated work of the group of 11 volunteers, also maintained communication with 13<sup>th</sup> School, headmaster, teachers, and kids’ parents.
- After the municipal school was closed we established and self-funded an independent space in the neighbourhood where we managed to conduct lessons for another 6 months.

**Business or sector:** Education and social intervention

May 2010 – October 2010

### Research project “The Transition: Voices, images, memory”, “Transition and borders” module

Anamnesis Association at the University of Sofia “Sv. Kliment Ohridski”, <http://prehodbg.com>

- Conducted fieldwork and oral history collection in border regions of Bulgaria. Supervised by assoc. prof. Michail Gruev (University of Sofia) and assoc. prof. Margarita Karamihova (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences).

**Business or sector:** Research and academia

September 2005 – April 2007

### Private tutor in Mathematics

Personal Tutors, Ashfield House, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 1BB, United Kingdom  
<http://www.personal-tutors.co.uk>

- I gave private lessons to British A-level students.

Business or sector: Education

## PUBLICATIONS

### In refereed journals and collections

- 2020. "On the retreat of liberal values and democratisation of access to discourse: extending post-foundational discourse theory" in *Discursive Approaches to Populism Across Disciplines - The Return of Populists and the People*, ed. M. Kranert, 199-223. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- 2020. Urban politics and Post-Foundational Discourse Theory. Political, technocratic and ordinary forms of action. *Annual of Sofia University*. In print, in Bulgarian. [Градска политика и дискурсна теория. Политически, технократични и обикновени форми на действието.]
- 2019. "Transitions at the Central Marketplace of Sofia: Changing Values and Architectural Plans From the 1980s Until 2013." In *Three decades of Post-Socialist Transition. Conference proceedings*, edited by Nebojša Čamprag and Anshika Suri, 349-55. Darmstadt: tuptints.
- 2018. Assembling the Post-Socialist Marketplace: Transitions and Regeneration Projects at the Central Pazar of Sofia. *EthnoAnthropoZoom*, 17, 229-279.
- 2018. On the historicity of urban places (by the example of the marketplace of Sofia). *Journal of the Institute for Modernity*, 23. In Bulgarian. [За историчността на градските места (по примера на софийския пазар).]
- 2017. Toward a theory of conspiracy narratives. *Critique and humanism*, 48 (2): 83-104. In Bulgarian. [Към теория на конспиративните сюжети.]
- 2016. Conspiracy narratives at the Women's Market. *Seminar\_BG* (3).
- 2014. Conspiracies around the Women's Market. *Seminar\_BG*, 9. In Bulgarian. [Конспирации около Женския пазар.]
- 2012. The citizens and the market. Discourses of an urban conflict. *Critique and humanism*, 39: 139-162. In Bulgarian. [Гражданиите и пазара. Дискурсите на един градски конфликт.]
- 2012. The traditional Muslim city: Portrait and approaches. *Orientalia*, 15-16: 83-153. In Bulgarian. [Традиционният мюсюлмански град. Портрет и подходи.]
- 2007. With S Coombes, L Shiau, I Bojak, D T J Liley and C R Laing. Modeling electrocortical activity through improved local approximations of integral neural field equations, *Physical Review E*, Vol 76, 051901-8.
- 2007. With S Coombes and P C Matthews. Dynamic instabilities in scalar neural field equations with space-dependent delays, *Physica D*, Vol 232, 1-15.

### Research reports

- 2019. Conviviality vs. politics of coexistence: Going beyond the Global North. *CAS Sofia Working Paper Series*, 11:1-42.
- 2017. With G Baycheva. Stolipinovo neighbourhood household survey report. Sofia: The Swiss-Bulgarian Cooperation Program – Program for the Promotion of Social Inclusion of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups. In Bulgarian. [Доклад от картографиране на кв. Столипиново.]
- 2016. With G Baycheva, R Kratunkova, D Panchev. Results from an ethnographic study of the communities in the neighbourhood of Stolipinovo. Plovdiv: Plovdiv 2019 – European Capital of Culture. In Bulgarian and English.
- 2015. "Rimskata stena" marketplace - a sociological analysis / Policies towards municipal markets. Sofia: Studio Architectonica & Sofia Municipality. In Bulgarian. [Пазарът "Римска стена" - социологически анализ / Политики към общинските пазари.]
- 2012. Civil society and the Women's Market. Sofia: The Research Institute of Social Sciences. In Bulgarian. [Гражданското общество и Женския пазар.]

### Mass media publications related to research

- Пролетта на „Столипиново“ – и есента на обществото. Разговор с д-р Никола Венков [Stolipino Spring and the autumn of society. A conversation with dr. Nikola Venkov], *Toest.bg*, 24.X.2020. Published also in *Marginalia*, 30.X.2020.
- Специални усилия за малцинствените махали са нужни, но не и отцепването им [Special efforts for the minority neighbourhoods are needed, but not their cordoning off]. *Dnevnik*, 23.III.2020. Published also as Столипиново: Не КПП-та, а работа с общността е нужна пред коронавируса [Stolipino: Not checkpoints but involvement with community is needed ahead of the coronavirus]. *Pod tepeto*, 23.III.2020.
- Красотата която споделяме [The Beauty We Share]. *Toest.bg*, 21.IX.2019.
- Слушай сега, чоджум: Разкази от Столипиново / Dedikodu ma'aleden [Listen now, son: Stories from Stolipino] . Collaborative bilingual zine with Hannah Rose and the local community in Stolipino, VII.2019.
- Разрушаването на квартала [Demolishing The District]. *K*, 14.XII.2018.
- Още за бъдещето на Женския пазар [More on the future of the Women's Market]. *Dnevnik*, 13.XI.2013.
- Антропологът: Този пазар е съгъстен образ на цялото ни общество [The anthropologist: This market is a condensed representation of our society]. *Regal*, 1.VII.2013.

Multiple participations on National Radio and once on National TV on topical issues related to my research and work.

## PRESENTATIONS

### Conferences and workshops

- Paper “Discourse circulation, access to political discourse and the retreat of illiberal values in Bulgaria” presented at intl. conf. *“Contemporary populism and its political consequences: Discourses and practices in Central and South-Eastern Europe”*, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia, 12-13.XII.2019.
- Paper “State Socialism and the “Cooperative Marketplace”: The Central Pazar of Sofia as a Point of Pride and a Challenge for the System” at *“(Re)thinking Socialism: Knowledge, Memory and Oblivion of the Socialist Past”*, Bulgarian Academy of Science, Sofia, Bulgaria, 7 – 9.XI.2019.
- Paper “Discourse theory and the faulty concept of ‘echo chambers’. A case study on the ‘gender scare’ in Bulgaria” delivered at the 3<sup>rd</sup> *DiscourseNet Congress “Knowledge and Power in a Polycentric World”*, Université de Cergy-Pontoise, Paris, France, 11-14.IX.2019.
- A publication draft “On the retreat of liberal values, new propaganda and the democratisation of discourse production: A ‘third sex’ spooks everyone” discussed as a central paper at a workshop *“How to Get your Paper Published in an International Journal” of the East-European Politics and Societies Journal*, Zagreb, Croatia, 12-13.VI.2019.
- Paper “Transitions and renovation projects at the central marketplace of post-socialist Sofia: changing values and plans from the 1980s untill 2013” presented at the intl. conference *On cities and change: Three decades of post-socialist transition*, TU-Darmstadt, Darmstadt, Germany, 17-18.V.2019.
- Paper “Conviviality vs. politics of urban coexistence: Going beyond the Global North metropolis” at workshop *Urban societies of migration across Europe. Scopes and limits of the postmigrant perspective*, Leipzig, Germany, 16.V.2019.
- Co-convenor of an open forum discussion between practitioners from Eastern Europe “Civic activism and changes in the city: Resources, alliances, tools and local opportunities for effective urban agency” at *TRIPAR Conference “Space, values and power – Eurasian cities and regions in transformation”*, Kyiv, 16-18.XI.2018. Delivered also a talk “Is the struggle for more public involvement in Sofia’s urban development misguided? The example of the Women’s Market.”
- “The production of a threatened populus: ‘the introduction’ of gender in an East-European country” presented at conference *New discourses of populism and nationalism*, Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, 21-22.VI.2018
- “From anthropological research to art as a move of activist practice: “The Unseen Women’s Market” and other projects” at conference *“Teaching and Learning Anthropology and Ethnography in Eastern and Southeastern Europe”*, University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, 12-13.V.2018.
- “What’s in the cracks between concepts? Meeting Bourdieu and Laclau-Mouffe for a multi-level analysis of urban conflicts” presented at 3<sup>rd</sup> *Forum of the International Sociological Association*, Vienna, 10-14.VII.2016.
- “The Unseen Women’s Market: an art-documentation initiative as an instrument for struggle” presented at the *International Conference “From CONTESTED\_CITIES to Global Urban Justice”*, Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Madrid, 4-7.VII.2016.

- “The Contexts of a Post-socialist Marketplace: Transitions from the 1980s to 2013” at *International Conference “New consumer practices of the XXI-st century: Anthropological perspectives”*, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, 23-25.IV.2015.
- “Transitions and renovation projects for the central marketplace of post-socialist Sofia” at *International Workshop on Global Marketplaces and Urban Renewal and Regeneration Strategies*, IMMRC, KU Leuven, Leuven, 21.XI.2014.

More than ten presentations of my mathematical work on conferences and workshops in the UK, Europe and the USA.

Summer schools and student conferences

- *Spring School “The City in the Spotlight: Methodological and Epistemological Challenges of Studying Urban Governance”*, Center for Comparative History and Politics, Perm, 15-21.IV.2018. Presentation: “Political manifold: developing a theoretical instrument for studying multi-level urban politics.”
- Presenting at the *Student-Doctoral Seminar “Debuts in Sociology”*, Department of Sociology, University of Sofia, Gioletchitza, and at *Student Ethnological Meetings 2015 “The field: Traditions and Innovations”*, Department of Ethnology, University of Plovdiv, Plovdiv.
- *WWTF International Summer School “Designing Places of Emancipation”*, Technische Universität Wien, Vienna, 30.VIII - 5.IX.2014. Study and community interaction on the topic “Between emancipatory practices and everyday life.”
- “The construction of urban policies and the politics of urban coexistence” presented at *Marie-Jahoda Summer School “Public Spaces in Transition”*, Universität Wien, Vienna, 5 - 9.VII.2014.
- *7th Summer School in Anthropology, Ethnography and Comparative Folklore of the Balkans*, Konitsa, 25.VII - 9.VIII.2012. Fieldwork and presentation on topic “Tani kufiri u bë një. The border has become one.”
- *Youth training course “Peace builders for divided communities”*, Bitola, 22 - 29.IV.2012. Presented “Divided communities and conflict in urban settings”
- *5th Summer School in Anthropology, Ethnography and Comparative Folklore of the Balkans*, Konitsa, 28.VII - 12.VIII.2010. Short research and presentation on the topic “Helping Neighbours: Social Segregation of Albanian Labour Migrants in a Greek Border Village.”

Public lectures and presentations (non-academic)

- Presentation “The state of emergency in a large minority neighbourhood, 13.III – 13.V.2020”, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 16.XII.2020.
- Co-organised a *Creative Workshop “Building up/with the Communities”* for training European Capital of Culture Plovdiv 2019 applicants for artistic work in Stolipinovo Roma & Turkish neighbourhood, Plovdiv 2019, Plovdiv. 7-12.XI.2016.
- Local coordinator for *Mapping Mobilities Workshop*, part of project *Stop and Go* of The Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies of The Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, Sofia, 1-4. IV.2015. Presenting exhibits from the Unseen Women’s Market.
- Multimedia presentation “The human face of the Women’s Market. The Battle for the market.” at the *International Festival of Ethnographic Cinema*, Sofia, 9.XI.2013.
- “Sofia people go to the Market”, participation with the Unseen Women’s Market Initiative in Municipality of Sofia’s *Day of Mobility*, Sofia, 22.IX.2013
- Opening lecture of the discussion series “*City – Citizenship – Boundaries*” of Social Centre “Haspel”, Sofia, 14.V.2013.

Invited lectures on my research at the Women’s market for students in Architecture, Urban Planning, (University of Architecture and Planning, Sofia), Cultural Studies and Sociology (University of Sofia), since 2011. Presentations for grassroots and NGO groups.

PERSONAL SKILLS

Mother tongue(s)

Bulgarian

Other language(s)

UNDERSTANDING	SPEAKING	WRITING
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	Listening	Reading	Spoken interaction	Spoken production	
English	C2	C2	C2	C2	C2
Serbo-Croat	B2	A2	B2	B1	A2
Russian	B2	B2	B1	A2	A2
German	A2	B1	B1	A2	A2
Spanish	A2	A2	A1	A1	A1

Levels: A1/A2: Basic user - B1/B2: Independent user - C1/C2 Proficient user  
[Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#)

Communication skills

- Excellent communication skills with members of various social and cultural groups. Rich experience working with Bulgarian Roma and Turkish of all ages and backgrounds – in Sofia, Plovdiv and various villages.
- Presented at many conferences in Bulgaria and abroad. Taught university classes as well as classes through play with minority children (6 – 11 years old). Participated in youth trainings around the Balkans and organised workshops for activists.
- 2 years experience in Students' Theatre of University of Sofia

Organisational / managerial skills

- Brought together and was responsible for a team of 8 volunteers (professionals of different fields – from design to a curator, sound mastering, etc.) in the initiative “The Unseen Women’s Market”
- Managed a survey team of 8 interviewers on the field in a 3-months project with municipal partners.
- 1.5 years coordinating volunteers for work with Roma kids at the Women’s Market.
- Long experience as a researcher, where I take independent responsibility from concept to delivering results.

Digital competence

SELF-ASSESSMENT				
Information processing	Communication	Content creation	Safety	Problem solving
Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Independent	Proficient

Levels: Basic user - Independent user - Proficient user  
[Digital competences - Self-assessment grid](#)

- General: Office, slides, image, audio and video processing and more (e.g. long experience with MS/OpenOffice, Photoshop, Illustrator, Adobe Audition, ...)
- Sociological: NVivo, MaxQDA, SPSS, Gephi (SNA visualisation software)
- Web design: HTML5, CSS2, Javascript, PERL
- Programming: Pascal, Delphi, PERL
- Mathematics: MatLab, Maple, XPP/AUTO, Latex.