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THE GLOBAL (SOUTH) PROJECTION OF BRAZIL

Abstract: Brazil, the 8th largest global economy, has a territory with continental dimensions (measuring the double of the European Union) and a population that surpasses, easily, 200 million inhabitants. Its strategic role is obviously prominent in the contemporary world and especially in the Global South. Indeed, if we add to the aforementioned big numbers some key dynamic variables (such as its production of food and biofuels, its enormous reserves of drinking water, oil, gold, diamonds, critical minerals, biodiversity, precious woods etc.) it will be easier understood why the geopolitical value of this South American country is something more than outstanding (and also, why the U.S. understood that long time ago). On the other hand, it is necessary to add the Brazilian will to grow, influence, and project itself abroad which seems only possible in a multi-polar world order characterized by structures and dynamics different to the current one. It is for all those reasons, objective and subjective, that studying and understanding Brazilian reality is so relevant, and that is what this introductory article is about. For this purpose, we will begin by contextualizing the issue, by placing it in its strategic environment and by reviewing, finally, its internal contradictions. From there, all the chapters that make up this special issue will be introduced trying to explain the specific field of Brazilian reality that is questioned or explained in each text.

Keywords: BRAZIL,COMMODITIES, FOREIGN POLICY, GEOPOLITICS, GLOBAL SOUTH, MULTIPOLARITY, STRATEGIC RESOURCES

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Introduction

In 1992, Francis Fukuyama, a RAND Corporation researcher, Sovietologist and a former student of Samuel P. Huntington, published an unexpectedly successful book "The End of History and the Last Man". Since its release, this work has sold over a million copies, an uncommon record for a political science text. Its significance, however, goes far beyond its sales: it vividly encapsulates the historical period that followed the Cold War.

At that time, the international system transitioned rapidly from a bipolar structure, based on the principle of 'containment' - between two 'super powers'- and in a Neo-Keynesian consensus to a unipolar order in which the United States not only emerged as the only 'super power' but also as a model. This marked the dawn of the golden age of 'super imperialism' and more specifically, of neoliberalism (Hudson, 2003). It was in this context that Fukuyama dared to declare the "end of history" proving that by the late 20th century, any political or systemic alternative to the hegemonic model had become absolutely unthinkable.

Three decades later, however, this once-undisputed model seems to be approaching its limits. A multipolar reality, characterized by the proliferation of some concurrent powers and counter - powers, some of them "illiberals", appears to be emerging on a global scale. The first symptoms of the unipolar model exhaustion (and by extension, of neoliberalism) began to surface in 2008 when a massive financial crisis shook the foundations of the world economic order. This big crisis altered the foundations of the monetary policies, investment flows, global demand and, significant to Brazil, supply chains.

Coincidentally or not, the following year witnessed the first meeting, in the heart of Eurasia, of a group of countries that had been "inspired" by a famous article published, in 2001, by the British economist Jim O'Neill: 'Building Better Global Economic BRICs'. "BRICs" is a clever acronym coined by O'Neill, referred to the initials of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, countries that convened in Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation, in 2009. The following year, at the Brasilia summit (Brazil), South Africa joined the group, adding the capital "S" to BRICS. In his article, O'Neill had posited that, in the long term, these five countries had the potential not only to become attractive destinations for foreign direct investment but also to pose a real geopolitical challenge to the G7 economies. More than twenty years later, the BRICS+, which now includes also Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Iran, is helping shape a multipolar world order that is emerging as a complex system and a novel challenge for the United States and its Western allies (Stuenkel, 2020).

The group has indeed demonstrated its capacity to transform certain counter-hegemonic ideas into specific initiatives. These initiatives include development financing under less onerous conditions, more competitive and flexible payment systems and more decentralized infrastructures adapted to local productive needs, etc (Stuenkel, 2020).

Brazil is now a consolidated part of this structure, which, despite its diffuse and contradictory nature and the criticisms it has faced, has proven its resilience. Within this strategic framework, Brazil is a specific case. On one hand, with India and South Africa, it is a part of the Global South contingent within the BRICS, a hybrid system combining both Asian and Southern countries -"Meridionals", in terms of a certain Brazilian academic debate- (Martin, 2018). On the other hand, following Argentina's refusal to join the organization (despite being admitted in 2023, prior to President Javier Milei's election) Brazil remains the only Latin American country in the group.

The specificities of the South American country such as its enormous territory, which is twice the size of the European Union, have granted it a distinctive foreign policy trajectory. Historically for example, Brazil has been, for various reasons (historical, geographical, geopolitical, etc.) one of the few countries in the region to maintain consistent and continuous links with Africa, especially with the Portuguese speaking countries -such as Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe. It is interesting to underline, in this regard, that Portuguese is the eighth most spoken language in the world and the third most spoken in the Western world, after English and Spanish. Since 1996, it has also become a geopolitical tool with the founding of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), through which Brazil also projects itself abroad and in which African countries have a significant weight.

Brazil is in fact a kaleidoscopic reality that is often poorly understood beyond its borders. Sometimes simplistic stereotypes tend to distort the image of the world's ninth-largest economy (larger than those of countries such as Canada, Russia, Mexico, Australia or Spain, among others). However, Brazil is a key player on both the global and regional stages. In Latin America it represents nearly half of the region's territory (42%) and a third of its population (32%) and of its GDP. If viewed from the perspective of South America, Brazil accounts for almost half of its surface (47%), population (49%) and GDP (52%). Its significance remains evident regardless of the scale. From an external standpoint, this is very significant and consequently geopolitically attractive (Furtado, 2007).

The strategic importance of Brazil was recognized by the United States, especially, during Henry Kissinger's tenure as Secretary of State (1973–1977) as "critical [country] to the U.S. efforts to secure its influence in the region" (Spektor, 2009). This observation was reproduced, some years later, by the Brazilian economist Ruy Mauro Marini, who, consistent with the concept of the 'semi-periphery' developed by world-system thinkers such as Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) or, later, Giovanni Arrighi (1994), categorized Brazil's regional influence as a form of 'sub-imperialism' (Marini, 1977). More recently, Oliver Stuenkel revisited this never closed debate (2013). This supposedly tendency, which has apparently never translated into real intense trade relations with the neighboring countries (maybe with the exception of Argentina) was not a simple product of an inertia tied to, for instance, the country's size. Rather, the will to expand and consolidate its influence in the surrounding region was articulated as a clear geopolitical objective in the mid-20th century by military intellectuals like Mário Travassos (1935) or Golbery do Couto e Silva (1957). Travassos, for example, adapted some geopolitical categories such as the "heartland"—and its associated objectives—developed by the British thinker Sir Halford Mackinder (1904), to the South American reality and to the Brazilian interests. This adaptation occurred within the context of a national debate focused on the expansion, ordering, and utilization of Brazil's then sparsely populated interior (Hecht, 2021).

Brazil remains, at the end of the day, a key player in Latin America, especially in South America, not only due to its size but also because of its geopolitical will. This perception persisted in the United States even after the end of the Cold War. A RAND Corporation report, published in 2001, emphasized Brazil's strategic potential due to "its strategic natural resources, military capabilities, and its growing leadership in regional forums like Mercosur and international ones like the G20" Some years later, Michael Reid highlighted in his book "Brazil: The Troubled Rise of a Global Power" (2014) that U.S. analysts have consistently viewed Brazil as "essential to the region's stability".

South America has remained in the global context, despite the crises, as a very attractive geopolitical area due to its population, its potential as a market but, above all, its strategic natural resources, within the framework of the digital and energy transitions (Bruckmann, 2012). Within this framework, relations between their countries have been shaped by periods of contraction, détente and cohesion, which are reflected in phases of ups and downs in the processes of formation, consolidation and fragmentation of multilateral regional integration arrangements. Beyond the trade exchange Brazil endeavors to exercise a degree of leadership in these regional integration processes, and often has the technical and institutional capacity for it. However, it is unable to effectively fulfill the role of paymaster, economically funding investments to build and maintain physical cross-border infrastructure needed for regional social and economic development (Garcia, 2019). That is a real strategic challenge and, ultimately, an objective limitation for a regional influence that has never been truly complete.

Apparently, China perceived all these fragilities a long time ago, at a time - few after 2001/9/11 - in which all US attention had been focused on Western and South Asia. Not by chance since 2013, following the 2008 financial global crisis, the East Asiatic country became Brazil's largest trading partner, opening a new era of strategic balances in South America. Many of Brazil's neighbors, such as Chile or Peru, have not remained indifferent to this general shift. Since then, South America has increasingly turned its attention to the Pacific Rim and Basin, and Brazil has followed this trend, despite its Atlantic character and historical relations with Europe and the United States (Stuenkel, 2020).

In this case, once again, this is not merely a matter of inertia but of a clear political will. When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva assumed the country's Presidency for the first time in 2003, the Brazilian Foreign Policy underwent a profound transformation. Celso Amorim, who served as Minister of Foreign Relations twice (1993–1995 and 2003–2011) and once as Minister of Defense (2011–2015), repeatedly described this policy as "altiva e activa" (Lopes, 2020). This 'pride and activism' led the South American country to diversify its partners and its global strategic priorities with greater emphasis, becoming a founding member of the BRICS and a proponent of multipolarity in various forums (notably the G20 and the United Nations COPs). This Brazilian stated intention has consisted of contributing to the democratization of international institutions crucial for global governance and development, such as the United Nations Security Council or the International Monetary Fund.

Summarizing, Brazil presents a compelling case for study, as it embodies three key characteristics in the current turbulent global context: it is, definitively, an influential actor on multiple scales of contemporary international politics; it is also a net exporter of strategic natural resources to the Global North and last but, not least, it is an open advocate of multipolarity coming from the Global South. This collective work, and the introduction that precedes it, are aimed to show and explain all these nuances writing "from" Brazil, not merely "about" Brazil.

Strategic Assets, Key Point

Brazil, in recent years, has consolidated its international standing due, not only to its size, but to the strategic nature of its natural resources and to its aforementioned geopolitical will, "pride and active", frequently underestimated. In fact, the commodities exported from the South American country gain momentum in the framework of an increasingly turbulent international system, where the cleavages and tensions that are accompanying the transition towards a multipolar world are rising (Burges, 2017; Stuenkel, 2020). It is also important to remember that the exported natural resources are having a significant value in the context of two structural transitions: the digital and the energy.

Related to the first one, it is important to remember that the global production system is shifting from an analog to a digital model, transforming how our economies produce goods and services and interact between them (Gereffi, 2018). As for the second, we are beginning to witness a slow but inevitable shift from fossil fuels to clean energy sources in response to the growing climate crisis and the consequent need to reduce carbon emissions. Both processes need specific resources whose demand has risen exponentially, as seen in the case of strategic minerals and agricultural commodities—areas in which Brazil plays, if not a dominant, at least a strategic role.

Contemporary geopolitics pivots around some key questions, decidedly different to those of the XX century: Who possesses the critical resources needed for the aforementioned 'transitions'? Under what conditions and at what cost can these resources be extracted? What power relations determine their trade? And most importantly, who adds value to them? (Cruz et al., 2023; Sassen, 2002). These questions are particularly relevant in a context of change, where the Global North is increasingly dependent on the Global South to maintain its competitiveness in international markets (Estenssoro, 2019).

A key feature of the current situation is that the emergence of a new production system, despite the official stories, does not seem to be displacing the old one. Instead, both coexist, generating simultaneous demands. In practice, the need for oil remains high, while the demand for lithium for batteries and electronic devices is only at the beginning. This phenomenon has considerable strategic implications. In Latin America, for instance, Venezuela, with its immense oil resources, and Bolivia, with its vast lithium reserves, serve as concrete examples of how traditional and emerging commodities coexist and together had a real potential to reshape the geopolitical structures of the Global South (Estenssoro, 2019).

In such a context, Brazil is a key player. Its natural assets position the country as a crucial actor in both global and regional geopolitics. In a world marked by instability, moving towards a multipolar conformation, the South American country is increasingly perceived as a source of critical natural resources (Burges, 2017; Bruckmann, 2012).

One of Brazil's most valuable resources is fresh water. The country holds 12% of the world's reserves, making it a "global strategic reserve" in the context of a climate crisis that has water scarcity as one of its corollaries (Silva & Hussein, 2019). At the same time, these water resources are essential for agricultural production and for hydroelectric generation—both pillars of the Brazilian economy. Regions like the Amazon or the Pantanal not only supply the more than 200 million people living in the country but also ensure its agricultural production and energy generation (Oliveira, 2017).

Brazil's agricultural capacity is another key factor in its global projection. In recent years, the country has become one of the world's largest producers of soybeans, beef, poultry, and sugar, positioning it as an indispensable actor in global food supply chains (Baraibar Norberg, 2020; Ponte et al., 2019). As global demand for food continues to rise, both in the Global North and South, Brazil has solidified its role as one of the world's primary suppliers, ensuring global food security (Gereffi, 2018).

In terms of mineral resources, Brazil is also a fundamental player. The extraction and export of iron ore, bauxite, niobium, and other strategic minerals place the country in a privileged position to supply critical inputs for both the digital and energy transitions (Hecht, 2021). Niobium, for instance, is essential for producing electronic devices and batteries, while lithium -present in Brazil and other South American countries, such as Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia- is crucial for manufacturing batteries for electric vehicles, whose demand is rapidly increasing (IEA, 2024).

Besides its wealth in minerals, Brazil also boasts significant reserves of gold and diamonds. Despite controversies, regarding the environmental and social impacts of its extraction, these resources remain an important source of revenue for the country in an unstable world in search of financial refuges (Porto Gonçalves, 2012).

Another strategic resource that cannot be overlooked is the hydrocarbons. Despite the energy transition discourse the global demand for oil and natural gas remains high. In this context, Brazil has consolidated its position as one of the largest hydrocarbon exporters, ensuring its rising competitiveness in global markets (and especially as an oil supplier to China and the US)

Finally, Brazil's rich biodiversity constitutes one more strategic asset. The Amazon, besides being one of the world's most biodiverse regions, plays a crucial role in global climate regulation (Viola & Franchini, 2017). Brazil's biodiversity is invaluable for scientific research and for the development of biotechnological products, with enormous potential for innovation in sectors such as agriculture and pharmaceuticals (Ellwanger et al., 2022). Moreover, preserving vast areas of tropical forest is essential in the fight against climate change, as they contribute significantly to atmospheric carbon sequestration. This is, by the way, another Brazilian asset frequently utilized as a tool in the country's foreign policy (Hecht, 2021).

In this framework, the Amazon is a geopolitical locus for excellence. In fact, in contemporary times, geopolitics is no longer restricted to the power of the state over the use of territory and the pressures and interventions of other states, but how other agents (state, sub-national and non-state - domestic and foreign) manage to influence state decision-making on the use of territory through veiled coercion. Faced with this geopolitical challenge, Brazil and other South American countries should abandon the paradigm of the frontier economy, which has characterized every Latin American formation that has prioritized the continuous territorial incorporation and exploitation of natural resources, and find possible ways of reconciling economic growth, environmental conservation and social justice, which can in fact serve as a counterweight to the geopolitical projects of the powers that dispute the stocks of natural wealth distributed asymmetrically over the earth's surface (Becker, 2005; Garcia, 2019).

In short, and despite its abundant natural wealth, Brazil faces significant challenges in a critical global context such as the contemporary (Le Billon, 2004). The intensive exploitation of all these resources exerts growing pressure on the environment, exacerbating problems such as deforestation, river pollution or biodiversity loss (Moura, 2016). Historically, the Brazilian economy has been marked by successive production cycles centered on the export of products such as sugar, cocoa, cotton, coffee or rubber (Dean, 1976). Currently, within the context of the digital and energy transitions, several of these cycles seem to coexist and overlap, leading to intensive exploitation called by some as 'neo-extractivism' (Svampa, 2019) with potentially irreversible consequences, as could be seen in the so-called 'sacrifice zones' (Zografos & Robbins, 2020).

From an economic perspective, the proliferation of these production cycles has worsened Brazil's terms of integration into the global economy. Despite its wealth in resources, its capacity to add value remains limited due to various factors. This means that much of the added value is exported abroad, perpetuating the dynamics of dependence long debated by Brazilian scholars (Santos, 1972). Furthermore, many of Brazil's strategic productive sectors are not controlled by local companies but by multinational corporations operating in the country, significantly reducing the country's ability to fully benefit from its resources (Cruz et al., 2023; Baraibar Norberg, 2020).

In the end, the paradox between Brazil's geopolitical potential and its economic dependence tends to temper its real weight on the international stage. Although the country possesses relevant assets to be a key global player, its internal economic structures and the power dynamics that characterize the exploitation of its natural resources continue to limit its real ability to exert greater influence in the global system. Nevertheless, due to its ambiguous character and to its geopolitical will, materialized, for instance, in the BRICS, in the G20 or in the UN COPs, Brazil remains an indispensable actor in the contemporary world, making it a subject of critical importance for study: this work is about that.

Understanding Brazil

As coordinators of this special issue about Brazil, what we aim is to facilitate an interdisciplinary and didactic immersion into a reality, really diverse, complex and even, contradictory. Clearly, not all possible angles, focus, perspectives, or viewpoints are covered here, but we sincerely believe that all articles offer a meaningful representation of a country that at the end of the day is heterogeneous and plural.

Our fundamental goal is to help navigate the common stereotypes about Brazil and provide some academic tools to build more robust, informed, and even less mediated approaches to a diverse nation that, in recent years, has emerged as a key player on the international stage, in the Global South, and of course, in the current debate about multipolarity.

We reached out, to this end, a wide group of colleagues (up to 17) from Brazilian cities and regions geographically really distant from one another - for example, there are 4,336 kilometers between the Northern city of Manaus, capital of the State of Amazonas, where two of the authors of the text n°09 lives, and the Southern city of Santa Maria, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, where the author of the text n°10 lives.

We also wanted to ensure gender balance in our proposal. Often, when collaborative texts are organized about Brazil, there are few female voices contributing to and problematizing their own country. In that sense, we are proud to announce that eight of the 17 authors—almost half—are women.

The most important criterion was, in any case, that the authors, wherever they come from and whether they are men or women, know well the topics they are talking about. Below and without further delay we will briefly present the texts that you will find developed later.

The special issue starts with text "Brazil and China: a Strong Partnership", written by Ana Tereza Lopes Marra de Sousa, which presents the evolution of strategic partnerships between Brazil and China, focusing on the Sino-Brazilian High-Level Concertation and Cooperation Commission (COSBAN), and concludes that the flexibility of the partnership's institutional apparatus, as well as its adaptability to embrace new interests, is what has sustained the relevance of this partnership.

Bilateral relations between Brazil and the United States are historic, often considered the cornerstone of both countries' foreign policies. But external and internal factors have affected this hegemonic actor's ability to influence. The text 'Brazil and the USA: a Relationship in Decline?" written by Clarissa Nascimento Forner and Rodrigo Fernando Gallo, focuses specifically on the governments of Donald Trump (2017-2021) - USA, Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022) - Brazil, the first years of the Biden administration (2021-2024) - USA, and the beginning of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidency (2023-2024) - Brazil.

The following articles seek to portray Brazil's economic, trade and politics issues over the last two decades.

Gabriel de Oliveira Rodrigues, Daniel Arruda Coronel and Aline Beatriz Schuh in their study 'Brazil's Economic Opening from 2000 to 2020' analyzed the economic performance of Brazil from 2000 to 2020, addressing the behavior of the country's exports, imports, and GDP. The authors used the degree of Economic Openness and the Export Effort index applied, using data from the Secretariat of Foreign Trade and the World Bank. Over the last two decades, there were periods of decline in Brazilian exports that culminated in the reduction of the country's GDP. The exception to this situation was the increase in commodity exports, positioning Brazil as a primary export leader in the segment, especially to China.

In the text "Mistaken Theses in the Debate on Deindustrialization and Loss of Competitiveness of Brazilian Industry", José Luís Oreiro explains why the theses of orthodox economists are wrong in relation to the process of deindustrialisation in Brazil, which took place between 2008 and 2012. Oreiro argues that deindustrialisation in Brazil is not a natural result of the development process, but is premature and caused mainly by the overvaluation of the exchange rate, which is the result of the increase in the terms of trade that occurred between 2005 and 2011.

The text "The Ambiguities of Agribusiness: Potentials and Challenges for Brazil", the authors Rodrigo Peixoto da Silva, Gesmar Rosa dos Santos and Fernanda Cigainski Lisbinski aimed to present the current debate by presenting data and information about Brazilian agribusiness, subsiding discussions about its economic and social functions, as well as its inherent ambiguities, in order to promote a well-informed discussion, dispel certain misconceptions about agribusiness and identify the main issues and externalities that require attention.

The article “Democracy, the Language of Rights, Coalitions and the Political System in Brazil” written by Alessandra Maia Terra de Faria, presents the current complex popular sovereignty of Brazil’s political system, composed of a multi-party congress, in coexistence with the executive and judicial branches, and an electoral system of representation that imposes difficulties for the formation of a majority and the need for coalitions. However, the recent universal suffrage and the longstanding standing historical social inequality is combined with a federative system of unequal units, in which local, regional, and international economic groups and land ownership weigh on the national political situation and decisions.

Roberto Goulart Menezes and Rafael Alexandre Mello in their text “The Political Economy of Inequality and the covid-19 pandemic in Brazil” argue that neoliberalism has been in crisis since 2008, and specifically in the case of Brazil during the Jair Bolsonaro government (2019-2022), the adoption of the ultra-neoliberal agenda has reflected negatively on the Covid-19 pandemic, with direct effects on unemployment, the health system and social protection and welfare measures, increasing the extent and depth of the social and economic crisis.

Regarding environmental issues, the authors Ana Beatriz Castro de Jesus, Ricardo José Batista Nogueira, and Luciana Riça Mourão Borges, in their text “Dilemmas and Challenges for the Amazonian Biome” present an overview of the Pan-Amazon region, which is shared by nine countries, highlighting the extent of the borders and the importance of multilateral actions. However, each country has different standards regarding the relationship between man and nature and provides specific internal actions to attend social demands, implement infrastructure, and establish public policies and environmental laws for environmental protection, such as the creation of Conservation Units (UC) and Indigenous Lands (TI).

The last text, but not least, entitled “Family Farming and Food Sovereignty in Contemporary Brazil” wrote by Rita Pauli, presents the importance of highlighting the elements that link family agriculture with agrifood security and sustainable rural development in Brazil, from an interdisciplinary analysis, which includes economic, social and environmental analyzes and some secondary source data on government incentives for family farming through the National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture (PRONAF) and those assigned by Rural Credit for employer agriculture.

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ГЛОБАЛНА (ЈУЖНА) ПРОЈЕКЦИЈА БРАЗИЛА

Апстракт: Бразил, осма по величини светска економија, има територију континенталних димензија (двоструко више од Европске уније) и популацију која лако прелази 200 милиона становника. Његова стратешка улога је очигледно истакнута у савременом свету, а посебно на глобалном југу. Заиста, ако горе поменутим великим бројевима додамо неке кључне динамичке варијабле (као што су производња хране и биогорива, огромне резерве воде за пиће, нафте, злата, дијаманата, критичних минерала, биодиверзитета, драгоценог дрвета итд.) лакше је разумети зашто је геополитичка вредност ове јужноамеричке земље више него изванредна (а такође, зашто су САД то одавно схватиле). С друге стране, потребно је додати бразилску вољу да расте, утиче и пројектује се у иностранству, што се чини могућим само у мултиполарном светском поретку који карактеришу структура и динамика другачији од садашњег. Из свих тих разлога, објективних и субјективних, проучавање и разумевање бразилске стварности је толико релевантно, и о томе је реч у овом уводном чланку. У ту сврху, почећемо са контекстуализацијом питања, стављањем у његово стратешко окружење и прегледом, на крају, његових унутрашњих противречности. Одатле ће бити представљена сва поглавља која чине ово посебно издање покушавајући да објасне специфично поље бразилске стварности које се доводи у питање или објашњава у тексту.

Кључне речи: БРАЗИЛ, РОБА, СПОЉНА ПОЛИТИКА, ГЕОПОЛИТИКА, ГЛОБАЛНИ ЈУГ, МУЛТИПОЛАРНОСТ, СТРАТЕШКИ РЕСУРСИ