

Infrastructure-Superstructure Contradictions in Vietnamese Elite Sports: An Analysis from the Perspective of Historical Materialism

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Abstract: *Applying the historical materialist principle of the dialectical relationship between infrastructure and superstructure, this study examines the development of Vietnamese elite sports from 2011 to 2026. Using historical-logical analysis and an empirical survey of managers, coaches, and athletes, the study identifies a performance paradox: Vietnam has maintained strong results at the SEA Games while achieving more limited outcomes at the ASIAD and Olympic levels. The analysis associates this pattern with institutional desynchronization between changing economic and material conditions and slower administrative and regulatory adaptation. Key issues include barriers to public-private partnerships, limited autonomy of sports federations, shortcomings in athlete remuneration and occupational insurance, and insufficient investment in advanced training technologies. In relation to Decision No. 1189/QĐ-TTg and national sports development objectives to 2030 with a vision to 2045, the study proposes coordinated institutional reforms, improved resource mobilization, and greater application of artificial intelligence, biosensors, and sports biomedicine to support sustainable elite sports development.*

Keywords: Elite sports; Historical materialism; Infrastructure; Superstructure; Institutional reform; Public-private partnership; Vietnam

1. Introduction

In the socioeconomic formation theory of historical materialism, the law of the dialectical relationship between infrastructure and superstructure occupies a central position. Infrastructure - the totality of production relations that constitute the real economic structure-plays the determining role regarding the origin, structure, and transformation of the superstructure [1]. Conversely, the superstructure-the system of political and legal ideological views along with corresponding organizational institutions-possesses relative independence and exerts a powerful counter-impact on the infrastructure that produced it: if it conforms to objective laws, it will facilitate economic development; if it is conservative and obsolete, it will become an obstructive force. [1], [6]

Applying this law to the specialized field of elite sports, infrastructure is manifested through specific economic-material relations: resource ownership relations (state budget, corporate capital, joint ventures), management and exploitation relations of market sports service chains (television broadcasting rights, commercial sponsorships, athlete transfers), and distribution-remuneration relations that govern the process of reproducing the specialized labor power of athletes and coaches [6], [7]. This system is organically linked to the level of sports productive forces (athletes' talents, facilities, competition equipment, biomedical applications, and digital data) [7], [8]. Meanwhile, the sports superstructure comprises the guidelines of the Party (typically Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW), the legal system of the State (the 2018 Law on Physical Training and Sports), national strategic decisions, the state administrative apparatus (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Department of Physical Training and Sports), and socio-occupational

institutions (Vietnam Olympic Committee, national sports federations/ associations) [3], [7].

In our country today, elite sports embody "soft power", human dignity, and national status in the international arena [8], [10]. Despite consecutively securing the first-place position on the overall medal tally at SEA Games 31 (2022) and SEA Games 32 (2023), Vietnamese elite sports has stagnated noticeably in the continental arena (ASIAD 19 in 2023) and the global arena (Paris 2024 Olympic Games). Purely operational analyses often merely place the blame on technical expertise or physical stamina. Grounded in the philosophical perspective of Marxism-Leninism, the essence of this situation is the emergence of a profound dialectical contradiction between a market sports economic infrastructure that is moving rapidly and a state management superstructure that transforms slowly, remaining heavily burdened with a subsidization mindset. Thoroughly grasping the spirit of the Strategy for the Development of Physical Training and Sports in Vietnam to 2030, with a Vision to 2045 (pursuant to Prime Ministerial Decision No. 1189/QĐ-TTg dated October 15, 2024) [10], clarifying the reality of this contradiction to propose a system of applied solutions is an urgent requirement.

2. Research Methods

The study applies dialectical materialist and historical materialist methodology, closely integrating theoretical analysis with empirical surveys:

- 1) **Analysis-Synthesis and Historical-Logical Methods:** Systematizing Party documents [2], the 2018 Law on Physical Training and Sports [9], the 2020 Law on Investment under the Public-Private Partnership Method (PPP Law) [5], Decree No. 152/2018/ND-CP [3], and

Decision No. 1189/QĐ-TTg [10] to clarify the institutional movement process of elite sports from 2011 to the present.

- 2) **Sociological Investigation Method:** Designing a standardized questionnaire “a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low/very dissatisfied) to 5 (very good/very satisfied).” The survey was conducted in late 2025 – early 2026 at 3 National Sports Training Centers (National Senior Athlete Training Center in Hanoi, National Athlete Training Center in Ho Chi Minh City—the facility that accepted the merger of the Can Tho Center from 2025, and National Youth Athlete Training Center in Da Nang) and the University of Sports Ho Chi Minh City.
- 3) **Survey Sample:** Collected 168 valid questionnaires ($N = 168$), comprising: 48 managers/experts (28.6%), 52 national coaches (31.0%), and 68 elite athletes (40.4%) belonging to Olympic, ASIAD, and prioritized martial arts sports groups (Track and Field, Swimming, Shooting, Weightlifting, Jujitsu, Taekwondo) [7]. Data were processed by descriptive statistics to serve philosophical analysis.

3. The Reality Of Dialectical Contradictions between Infrastructure and Superstructure in Vietnamese Elite Sports

3.1 Reality of Economic Resources and Infrastructure Polarization

Practical statistical data for the 2018–2024 period indicate that the economic structure of Vietnamese elite sports bears a heavy transitional subsidized character:

Table 1: Capital Structure Invested in Vietnamese Elite Sports (2018–2024)

Year	Direct State Budget	Socialized Capital	Olympic/ ASIAD Sports	Regional/ Other
2018	82,4%	17,6%	34,5%	65,5%
2020	80,1%	19,9%	36,0%	64,0%
2022	76,8%	23,2%	38,2%	61,8%
2024	73,5%	26,5%	39,5%	60,5%

As illustrated in Table 1, although non-state investment grew from 17.6% in 2018 to 26.5% in 2024, direct state budgetary allocations still account for nearly three-quarters of all capital expenditures. More critically, public investment remains dispersed across dozens of sports to maximize medal tallies at regional events, leaving less than 40% of financial resources dedicated to core Olympic disciplines. Private capital mobilization remains isolated in a few commercially lucrative sports (such as men's professional football and emerging recreational sports like Pickleball), while primary Olympic sports (Track and Field, Swimming, Weightlifting, Martial Arts) depend on public allocations.

This distorted investment structure directly constrains the material productive forces of training institutions. According to the empirical survey ($N = 168$):

- 1) **Specialized Competition Equipment:** 54.2% of respondents rated specialized apparatuses (electronic martial arts mats, automated shooting targets, regulation weightlifting bars) as deteriorated, while 27.5%

categorized them as sub-standard for international competition.

- 2) **Biomedical Recovery Facilities:** Only 11.7% identified their recovery infrastructure (cryotherapy, hyperbaric oxygen chambers) as modern; 43.3% rated it as severely deficient.
- 3) **Advanced Technological Integration:** 63.3% indicated that AI motion-tracking cameras and wearable biomechanical sensors were completely absent from daily training, and 73.3% confirmed the lack of a national big-data repository for tracking physiological profiles and mitigating ligament ruptures.

3.2 Contradictions in Distribution Relations and Athletic Labor Reproduction

A core tenet of Marxist economic theory is that distribution relations determine the conditions under which labor power reproduces itself. Athletic labor in elite sports represents a specialized expenditure of physical, nervous, and psychological energy at physiological limits, accompanied by high career risks. Empirical survey data from 68 elite national and junior athletes reveal severe distortions in distribution mechanisms:

- 1) **Direct Compensation:** Under Decree No. 152/2018/ND-CP [3], national team athletes receive daily per-diem wages averaging 7 to 8 million VND per month. A substantial 53.3% of athletes reported that this wage level fails to support basic household subsistence or allow financial accumulation for post-athletic transitions.
- 2) **Occupational Risk Mitigation:** A staggering 68.0% of respondents identified mandatory occupational injury insurance as absent or completely inadequate (mean score: 1.94/5.0). Under current administrative mechanisms, when athletes suffer catastrophic injuries (such as cruciate ligament tears or spinal trauma), specialized overseas surgeries remain reliant on discretionary emergency state funds or ad hoc philanthropic appeals. [4], [7]
- 3) **Career Transition and Welfare:** 54.7% of surveyed athletes reported zero institutional support regarding vocational re-skilling or formal university education pathways, creating structural insecurity that discourages sustained athletic commitment.

Table 2: Empirical Assessment of Superstructural Institutions ($N = 168$)

Evaluated Dimension	Mean (out of 5.0)	Dissatisfaction (%)
Legal Framework for Sports PPPs	2.05	78.0%
Mandatory Occupational Injury Insurance	1.94	81.5%
Administrative Autonomy of Sports Federations	2.52	58.9%
Policy Shift Away from Short-termism	2.68	53.6%

Source: Empirical field survey conducted by the author (2025–2026).

3.3. Institutional Lag and Governance Contradictions in the Superstructure

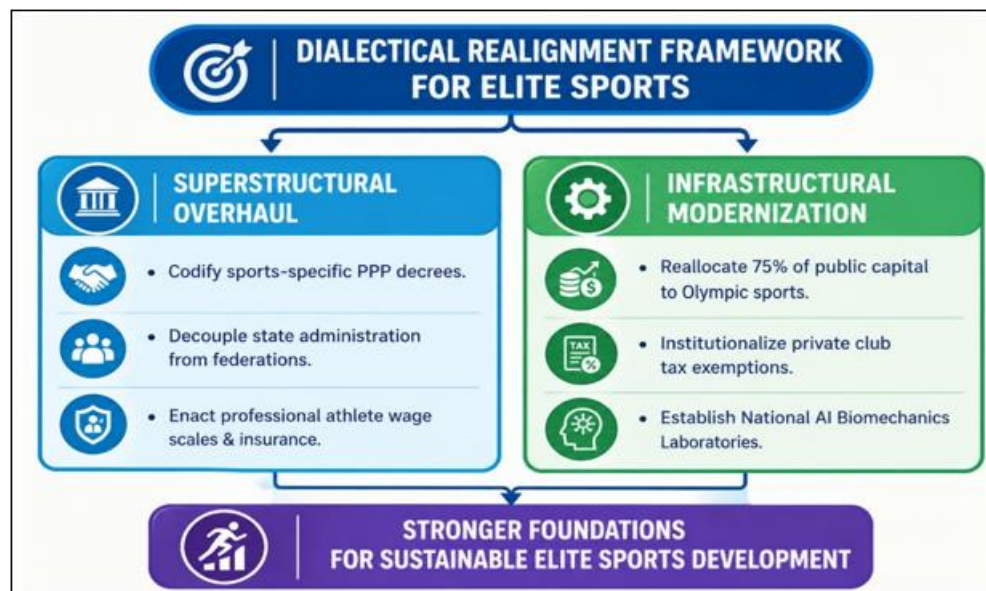
The data in Table 2 clearly expose the "desynchronization" between economic infrastructure and administrative superstructure [7], [9]:

- 1) **PPP Legal Barriers and Sports Land Issues:** 78.0% of experts and officials assess that gaps in the 2020 PPP Law and the 2017 Law on Management and Use of Public Assets are barriers preventing private capital from investing in public stadiums and training halls [5]. Public facilities face risks of violations when leasing commercial spaces outside operating hours, leaving infrastructure degraded while socialized capital is blocked outside.
- 2) **Bureaucratization of Socio-Occupational Federations:** 58.9% of respondents are dissatisfied with the "civil-servantization" status in national sports federations. Department of Physical Training and Sports officials concurrently hold executive titles (President, General Secretary), making federations operate like subsidized administrative bodies and stifling market dynamism.

- 3) **The Disease of Achievement Obsession and Term-Based Mindset:** 53.6% identify that the pressure of biennial SEA Games medal targets distorts long-term strategy. The sports sector concentrates resources on short-term regional goals rather than investing in 8–12 year Olympic cycles. This is the direct philosophical cause generating the **performance paradox**: Vietnam dominated SEA Games 31 (205 gold medals) and SEA Games 32 (136 gold medals), but declined at ASIAD 19 (dropping to 21st place) and came away empty-handed at both the Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 Olympics.

4. Strategic Reforms: Realigning Superstructure and Infrastructure

To untangle bottlenecks and develop elite sports in accordance with the goals of Decision No. 1189/QĐ-TTg, it is necessary to implement a synchronous system of solutions guided by the motto: **Perfecting superstructural institutions to lead the way in liberating and guiding the sports economic infrastructure.**



4.1. Group of Solutions for Perfecting the Superstructure (Mechanisms, Policies)

- 1) **Codifying Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Mechanisms in Sports:** Propose that the Government issue a specialized Decree guiding the 2020 PPP Law applied specifically to cultural-sports infrastructure. Institutionalize BOT, BTO, and ROT models at sports complexes and training centers; explicitly stipulate mechanisms for commercial service concessions outside training hours to generate legitimate revenue for reinvestment into professional training.
- 2) **Executing the "De-bureaucratization" of National Sports Federations and Associations:** Terminate the practice where state administrative officials (Department of Physical Training and Sports) concurrently hold key leadership positions (President, General Secretary) of federations. Transfer executive authority to sports economic managers and independent experts according

to international practices; grant full autonomy in contracting foreign experts and negotiating commercial sponsorships. [3], [7]

- 3) **Innovating Distribution Policies and Social Welfare Networks:** Amend Decree No. 152/2018/ND-CP, constructing a professional sports wage scale detached from civil service salary grades, based on athlete ranking standards and occupational risk indices. Legislate regulations **mandating high-coverage occupational accident insurance** for national team athletes, co-funded by the state budget and federation revenues. Establish a *National Fund for Vocational Training and Online University Education Support*, ensuring transitional employment after athletes retire from competition.

4.2. Group of Solutions for Developing Infrastructure (Exploiting Resources and Technology)

- 1) **Centralizing State Budget Capital:** Break away from equal distribution mechanisms; concentrate 70–80% of central budget capital into in-depth investment for the prioritized group of sports contending for medals at the ASIAD and Olympics under Strategy 1189/QD-TTg [10]. Fully transfer highly commercialized sports (Football, Tennis, Pickleball) to the socialized market.
- 2) **Institutionalizing Tax Incentives to Attract Private Capital:** Allow enterprises corporate income tax deductions (up to 150%) for sponsorship expenses granted to elite sports and youth sports academies. Provide long-term sports land lease exemptions and reductions (30–50 years) for high-performance sports complex construction projects.
- 3) **Technological Revolution in Sports Productive Forces:** Transform science and technology into a direct productive force [1], [8]. The State should invest in constructing a *National Sports Biomechanics and Biomedical Center* across the National Sports Training Centers (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang); equipping biochemical testing labs, hyperbaric oxygen chambers, and cryotherapy chambers for cellular recovery. Implement AI motion-tracking cameras and wearable biosensors to optimize kinetic technical trajectories in combat martial arts (Jujitsu, Boxing, Taekwondo), swimming, and track and field. Construct a national Big Data system managing athletes' biological profiles to proactively time peak performance and prevent ligament injuries.

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5. Conclusion

The development of Vietnamese elite sports from 2011 to 2026 demonstrates the importance of coordinating economic and material resources with an adaptive institutional framework. The findings indicate that limitations in public-private investment mechanisms, federation governance, athlete welfare, resource allocation, and technological capacity may constrain progress at the ASIAD and Olympic levels. Sustainable development therefore requires coordinated reforms that improve institutional mechanisms while strengthening investment in priority sports, athlete support, sports science, artificial intelligence, and biomedicine. Such alignment between the superstructure and the material foundations of elite sports can provide a stronger basis for implementing national sports development objectives to 2030, with a vision to 2045.

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