



Forest on the island in 2024

FLOODED ISLAND

In September 2024, Budapest faced one of the most severe floods in over a decade. Following an unusual amount of rainfall in the region, the water level of the Danube has risen rapidly, posing a significant threat to the city and surrounding areas. The flood, which is being compared to the devastating event of 2013, had triggered a third-degree flood alert across all flood protection sections in Budapest.

While the City was mitigating the dangerous situation, we couldn't help but wonder: what can architectural designers do to keep buildings in operation by users during flooding?

Do we have creative means to not only avoid the danger but somehow work with it?

What type of architectural programs or building construction types can interact (work) well with the water?

We invite you to discover one of Budapest's most intriguing islands, a frequently flooded area at the border of the IV. and XIII. districts called NÉPSZIGET.

aerial photo, in the center is Népsziget. In the foreground at the Újpest Bay, the Ganz Shipyard and Crane Factory, with the Clark Ádám floating crane moored in front of it. After the Újpest railway bridge, you can see the MAHART ship repair shop and the ships waiting for repairs moored in front of it, 1984, source: fortepan.hu



BRIEF HISTORY:

On the first army military survey map, drawn between 1782-1785 the island was covered by flood area forests, and it was frequently inundated with water. Unfortunately, the sections of the Danube Mapping relating to Budapest have been lost, but the extract from 1832 that was presented to Palatine József has survived. On this, Pest Island is still listed as an island. The settlement of Újpest does not exist, although the very first house was built on the Károlyi vineyard hill this year. The shape of the island has become much more streamlined. It is slightly wider in the north and narrows in the downstream direction.

Újpest became an independent settlement from Rákospalota in 1840. The name of the new settlement appears almost immediately in the nomenclature on the map, which is rather strange, because at that time the island still administratively belonged to the free royal city of Pest. In the 1830s, the embankment that closed off the side branch was built for the purpose of the Winter Harbor planned here. The map of 1856 clearly shows that the closure of the branch did not start directly on the coast, but started from the higher sand hills of the Vác highway. Presumably, they wanted to prevent larger floods from entering the bay from above. The Winter Harbor remained open from the south, so the current water level of the Danube determines the water level in it. In order for this not to be a problem during periods of low water, regular dredging was and is still necessary today. From then on, it could have been called the Újpest Peninsula, but for some reason, almost 180 years later, the common language still calls it an island. The island became easily accessible thanks to the embankment running along the route of Zsilip Street, on the map we can already see roads that cross each other along the two axes of the island. On the southern tip, coastal insurance was established against the washing away effect of the waves (in black). At the same time, a barrier was also built from the shore, which narrowed the riverbed to its current width. As a result, the waters of the harbor became quieter, and south of the closure, the shore filling began, the extent of which can really be seen in the



1782-1785. Pester Insel



1832. Pesti-sziget



1856. Neu-Pester Insel

forecourt of the Zsilip utca embankment shallower and shallower. Another interesting feature of this picture is the closure visible in the northern part of the Óbuda island. The origin of the mysterious piles of comments to the article surrounding the formation of Hajógyári Island must be found somewhere here...

In 1861, next to the slowly emerging settlement of Újpest, the name Pesti-sziget was re-named in the II. to the military survey section. The shape of the island can still be said to be natural, not a single building still stands on it at that time. From the southern part of the map, the city of Pest is rapidly expanding towards our island, and the German name of the under-construction Angyalföld appears. The small Palotai Island just appears in the north, which will play a role in this story.

On Manó Kogutowicz's 1906 map of Budapest, perhaps the most striking change is the appearance of the Újpest railway bridge. The railway bridge, better known as the Northern Link, was opened to traffic in 1896 after two years of construction. A huge embankment was built on the island for the railway, so that the highest water level could not threaten the traffic. This embankment practically cut the then still forested island in two. The Újpest harbor island is located entirely within the administrative boundaries of Budapest. The border drawn with a ruler followed the centerline of the Winter Harbour. Due to the industrial revolution coming along the axis of Váci út, factories mushroomed in the area, fields and arable land were parceled out, and smoking factory chimneys rose towards the sky.

Those familiar with "angelic" water sports and hiking maps may be familiar with the state of the island in 1929. If nothing else, at least the boat houses were realized from the sports facilities of the failed Olympics. Between the two world wars, a sports life and water world similar to the Roman coast was created here as well. The island is first mentioned on this map as "Népsziget". This immediately refutes the

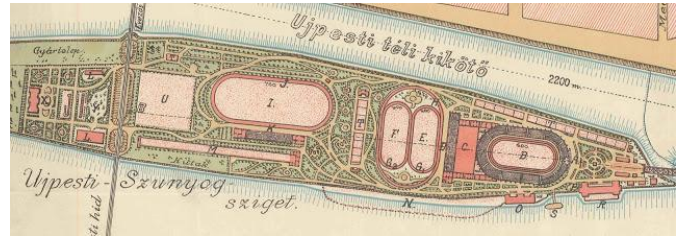


1861. Pester Insel



1906. Újpesti kikötő sziget

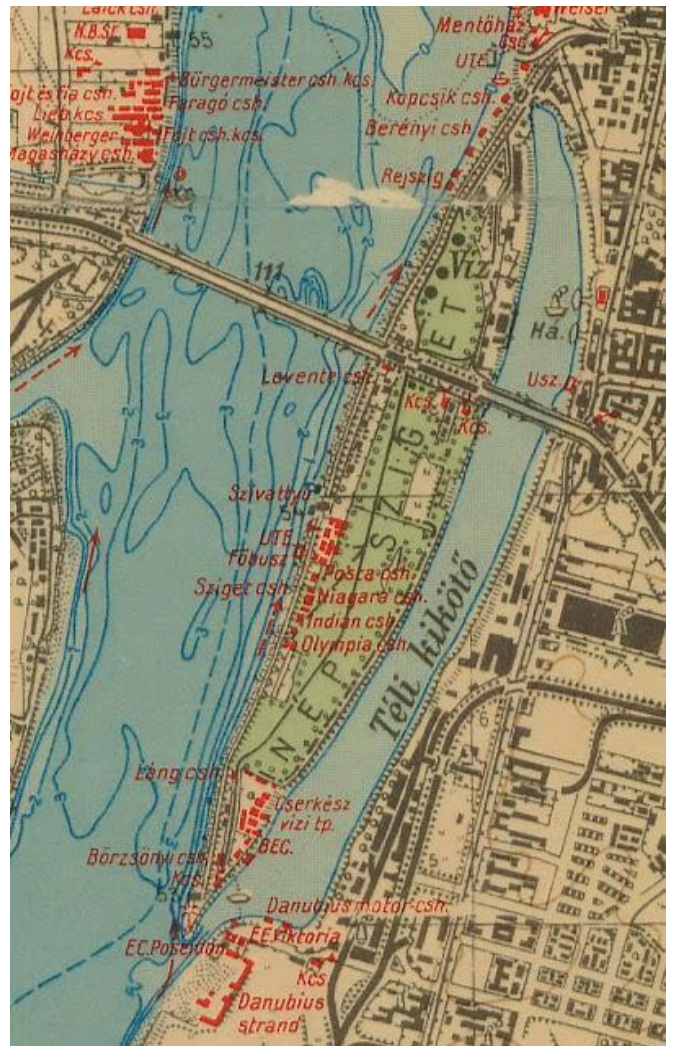
obvious etymological suggestion that this land could have been given this name only and exclusively after 1945. This gem of a map collection is a joy to browse. And those who still believe that not only in society and the economy, but also in cartography, a huge development took place after 1945, should take a look at another watersports map, scrolling down a little.



1921. Ujpesti-Szunyog-sziget

In the summer of 1914, Hungary won the right to host the 1920 Summer Olympic Games. However, the world competition on the Vörösmarty was washed away by the First World War. In 1919, the victorious powers took away the right to organize from the capital and gave it to Antwerp. Not only could Hungary not organize the Olympics, as a losing country, it could not even compete.

However, the Hungarian sports diplomacy did not give up and made serious efforts to organize the 1928 Games. According to the completed plans, the main location of the competitions would have been "Ujpesti-Szunyog Island". The plans have already been discussed here on the blog. Thanks to the large-scale investment, the image of the island would have completely changed, the previously wooded, building-free area would have been organically integrated into the city's blood circulation. Unfortunately, nothing came of the plans. The great potential of the Népsziget has gone forever, and anyone who knows the current state of the island cannot help but sigh.



1929. Népsziget

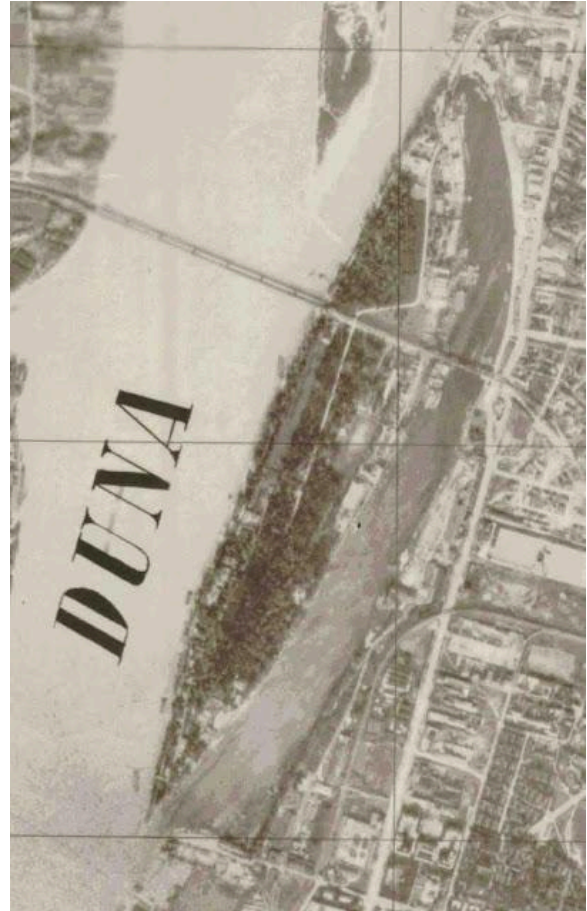
On our first aerial photo, in 1941, another island came into view. From the north, Palotai Island, which began to gain weight after the construction of the Megyer parallel, is slowly approaching Népsziget. The approach is continuous and unstoppable, but at this time the embankment on Zsilip Street is still almost as slender as in its new days. It was already more than 100 years old at that time. Shore filling occurred primarily on the side of the Winter Port, due to the needs of the factories here.

Since almost all land on the coast has already been developed, construction has also begun on Népsziget. In addition to the boathouses, the coastal filtering wells of Vízművek were built, but also apartments and (ship) factories were built. In 1943, the Governor himself inaugurated a barracks directly on the southern, harbor side of the railway bridge. This building still exists today, it was a worker's accommodation known as the Sziget Hotel, and has been empty ever since.

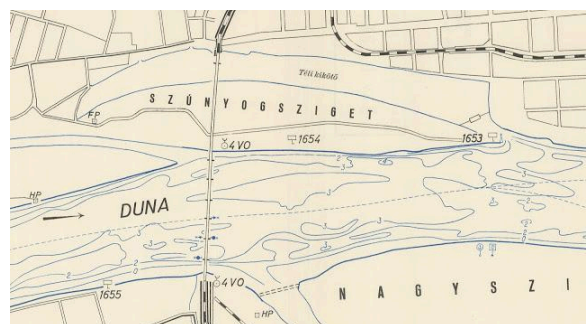
On the 1:10,000-scale outline overview map of the Danube, the name Szunyog-sziget appears again, even though it was already long before the II. We are after World War II. A bed survey very similar to the Hydrographic Atlas comes from the map archive of the Museum of Military History, the date of which is unfortunately unknown. It is certain that it was before 1980, because the Eszka-Pest Wastewater Treatment Plant is not yet on it. Narrowing down the circle further, it is also certain that it was before 1973, because in this year a pedestrian bridge for Water Works was completed on the southern tip of the island, and there is no trace of it on the map. However, it could not have been built before 1955, because the railway bridge is (again) standing. Palotai Island is right next door, only a narrow channel separates it from the coast and Népsziget. On the island, we can see river kilometer signs (the length of the island is about 2 kilometers), and the sign in the bed at the southern tip makes it clear that those who were not willing to walk to Zsilip Street could also get to Népsziget by ferry.

On this map, Népsziget is already divided between two districts. The IV. and XIII. the border between the districts runs on the embankment of the railway bridge, the creation of Greater Budapest, since 1950.

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1941. légifotó



1970 körül. Szunyogsziget

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On this map, Népsziget is already divided between two districts. The IV. and XIII. the border between the districts runs on the embankment of the railway bridge, the creation of Greater Budapest, since 1950. This Danube water sports map made in 1975 may seem like a pathetic attempt compared to its angelic predecessor from 1929. "Less" important information for water sports enthusiasts, such as flow conditions, water depth data, boathouses, restaurants, streets, characteristic buildings, and more could be continued. In the middle of the Kádár period, it seems that the embankment at Zsilip Street was reopened, so Népsziget could become an island again. Of course, it is possible that only the cartographers were wrong - on purpose. In addition to the many shortcomings, the only nice additional information is the indication of the 0 points of the water level on the bridge legs. Although the accuracy of the data is highly questionable, what if the creator of the map only intended to deceive the imperialist spies?

The construction of the sewage treatment plant on the neighboring Palotai Island began in 1980 due to the catastrophic sewage load on the Danube. In the case of Palotai, the island name is also a euphemism, since it has not been that way for a long time. To the



1980. Légifotó

north of the railway bridge, on the side of the main branch, the "two islands" have completely merged thanks to a young grass grove. The white line on the southern tip of Népsziget marks the new pedestrian bridge. It can be clearly observed that the silt-free water of the tributaries is much darker than the main branch of the flood. Mixing occurs only at the southern peak.

Around 1980, the ratio of the industrial and built-up area reached its maximum. The changes that occurred after the regime change primarily favored the expansion of vegetation, although if we think of the dry forest south of the animal farm, this remark is not necessarily correct. Népsziget has become an integral part of Budapest from a suburban floodplain forest over the past two centuries. Its image is defined on the one hand by the industry and the port, and on the other by the kayak-canoe water parks. It has been looking for its function since there were hardly any plants left on it. At that time, perhaps only a successful Olympic bid would have been a reassuring solution...

The shape of Népsziget was almost unchanged after it was attached to the coast as a peninsula. However, if you are looking for morphological changes, I wholeheartedly recommend the googleearth slider, which allows you to select the time of the recordings. The small bay between Palotai Island and Népsziget has undergone significant changes in recent years. Whether it's an advantage or a disadvantage, it's up to everyone to decide for themselves...



A Népsziget napjainkban (legifotok.hu)



2024

