The focus of this thesis shall be the European Social Dialogue and the Lisbon Strategy, or rather that dimension of the Lisbon Strategy that is most pertinent to both the Social Dialogue and to the European Union’s policies on industrial relations and employment, the ‘Social Policy Agenda’. The thesis should therefore be understood as being centred upon the Social Policy Agenda of the Lisbon Strategy realised through the European Social Dialogue.

The aim of the study is based around the pursuit of two related thematic questions. Firstly, is a certain understanding of the concept of ‘Society’ being rhetorically employed by EU institutions, in discussions of the Lisbon reform process, which is reliant upon distinctly ‘modern’ categories and epistemological-ontological assumptions. The crucial issue in relation to this question is whether or not those ontological and epistemological categories, upon which this ‘modern’ conceptual idiom depends, are still extant in our current historical context at the putative ‘modern-postmodern’ boundary. Secondly, assuming that there are certain conceptual confusions in the EU’s presentation of the Social Dialogue, does its consequent inability to establish a coherent and historically appropriate conceptual vocabulary create a political vacuum through which unrecognised social and economic forces operate based upon the imperatives and tendencies of highly developed capitalist society to reproduce itself on its own instrumental terms.

This thesis pursues its exploratory aims by means of a historical analysis of concepts. This means it will establish concepts as an epistemological method of comprehending social and historical phenomena, and will then apply this to an analysis of the usage of concepts in the Social Dialogue, but set in the context of historical time. The thesis should also be understood as a critique of the Social Dialogue. In particular, this thesis shall be an Immanent Critique aimed at the Social Dialogue. This is a mode of enquiry in social theory that analyzes cultural and social forms by identifying and exploring contradictions in the rules and systems necessary to the production of those forms.

The main results obtained are not in the form of data or verified hypotheses, but rather consist of an elaboration of the main themes toward providing exploratory conclusions. The result is therefore an elaborated confirmation of the original impressions of the Social Dialogue and Lisbon Strategy implied in the thematic questions at the outset.

In this thesis the main sources shall consist of European Commission Communications on the Social Dialogue, the Social Policy Agenda, and the Lisbon Strategy. The secondary sources are theoretical and shall be drawn upon to provide arguments, ideas, theories, and criticism in the conventional manner.