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## Opening Statement

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

**work** appears to be one of the most paradoxical phenomena of modern societies. It is one of those things that never quite seem to fit:

- Companies feel compelled to use less and less of it in order to survive in global markets.
- According to economic theory this should be fine since work is modelled as a disutility, anyway. And yet most people feel downgraded if they cannot support themselves through their own work.
- Many European countries face a lack of paid work, and they experience this as a serious threat to their social cohesion. On the other hand, fewer people than today were engaged in paid work in that golden post-war age which was called ‘full employment’.
- Nowadays, with more people working *and* more people unemployed, so much work that would be necessary to maintain our physical infrastructures as well as to sustain human well-being remains undone because of the lack of public finance.
- Finally, those who are in paid work tend to have more and more of it any time of the day, any time of the week, and any time of the year. They are being told by employers and by politicians
  - to work longer hours and longer careers,
  - to update their knowledge and employability in their own time,
  - but also to have more children and to educate them better,
  - to engage in voluntary work,
  - to consume more in order to keep the economy going,
  - and to save more for their old age because they can no longer rely on the systems of social security.

I have the impression that most people don’t quite figure how all that would go together.

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This Summer University of Work is not meant to be a ‘school’ where you can expect to get the formula to solve all the riddles of the subject called ‘work’.

Neither is it an academic exhibition ground where new scientific paradigms will get branded or where established ones can demonstrate the size of their discipleship.

Rather, by calling our gathering a ‘University’, we want to invoke the original meaning of the word. Ideally, we would like to hear and see interacting a universe of practical experiences, of academic disciplines, of cultural backgrounds, and of discourses embedded in different languages or families of languages.

Some 50 years ago, in the early times of the European project, the agenda of ‘European understanding’ was primarily about acceptance and toleration. The issue of the day was to make another war forever impossible and to exploit the benefits of economic co-operation. Nowadays, these achievements are largely taken for granted. In the Euro-Zone countries, we are experiencing that a common currency is a very practical thing to have but not much more. It makes us understand prices more easily but it does not help us to better understand anything else.

If European diversity is to become a strength rather than a weakness, Europeans will have to advance from toleration and acceptance towards comprehension. It is only in such a common comprehension beyond and above national institutions and practice that the often-cited ‘European Social Model’ can assume something like reality. Widespread uneasiness with the constitutional process and with further European enlargement seems to reflect, above all, just this: People feel that Europe has grown far beyond their current cultural, emotional and intellectual capabilities, and that they should get a chance to catch up before any further enlargement takes place.

In coming to grips with this multifaceted Europe, it is not enough to learn *about* each other. Besides, information of the ‘about’ type is readily available nowadays. It would be a waste of time and fuel to travel to Duisburg only to gain knowledge of, say, the employment rate of older women in Spain or of the mortality risk of flight attendants.

Neither should we be too ready to learn *from* each other. Quite often this only means to take from another country what we *think* we like about it – without really understanding how and why it works there. Naïve policy borrowing without awareness of the institutional and cultural context has already produced very destructive effects, especially in transformation countries – of which Germany, since its unification, is one.

Rather than learning *from* each other we should endeavour to learn *together*. In a process of learning *together*, people from other countries will ask us questions about our own country we would never ask ourselves or would never be asked at home. By trying to answer these questions, we will learn more about our own country. We will unveil the hidden meaning of institutions, traditions and narratives we normally take for granted. Only when we discover that the apparently same thing has a different meaning in a different society, only then do we advance towards *European* comprehension. Such comprehension is often missed in academic international comparisons where only stylised ‘facts’ are compared and where EUROSPEAK serves as the standardised linguistic medium. A vast number of European research projects fail to produce any new insight because each national team only contributes what they think they already know about their own country.

Learning *together* can be very rewarding whenever it actually takes place. However, it can also be difficult, painful and frustrating at times. If you should experience this, please just relax, there will another opportunity in the next activity. If, during these three days to come, a majority of you should experience moments of learning together, then your time and your fees, the considerable amount of European funding, the generous contributions of our sponsors – and please have a look at them in the

participants' manual! – , a year's work of preparation and the commitment of about a hundred activists will all be well invested.

In order to give mutual learning a chance to happen, we have designed this event in a way somewhat different from the conventional conference format:

Tomorrow's field trips are not intended as side-shows or sightseeing events but integrated into our thematic framework. The World Café scheduled for this afternoon and the Open Space on Saturday morning will be two sequences dedicated to intercultural learning whose outcome depends entirely on your active involvement and contribution. These methods may not be familiar to many of you although they are well established. So please trust in the process, trust our facilitators, and, above all, trust yourselves and your communicative abilities.

It is you who will make it happen!