From August 6 to September 7, I participated in the 5-week S2DS (Science to Data Science) bootcamp, organised by Pivigo. Pivigo is a Data Science hub and hosts a global marketplace to establish connections between businesses and talented data scientists. The S2DS program aims at helping analytical PhD graduates transition into a non-academic career in data science. The program consists of introductory lectures covering machine learning and basic commercial awareness, followed by intensive project-based training through a partnership with several UK based companies.

I was part of a team that worked with MADE.COM in predicting the demand for new products launched. MADE.COM is an e-commerce brand, selling furniture and homewares online. Its main goal is to make high-end design furniture available to everyone, and at an affordable price. This goal is achieved through a carefully designed cost cutting strategy and a redesign of the supply chain, bringing products directly from the manufacturer to the customer. To implement such strategy, while keeping lead times relatively short for the customer, it is pivotal to accurately predict product demand. This problem is particularly difficult for new products, which are launched as often as twice a week, since MADE.COM is a design oriented company.

Accordingly, the project I worked on aimed at reducing the error in demand prediction for new products. My team achieved that by cleverly engineering features that would enable to establish similarity in between products and “learn” from previous launches to predict the performance of future ones. The project was very successful: we reached the target error reduction (set at the start of the project), and provided MADE.COM with a number of useful insights into the usefulness of their available product and sales data. My team’s project was awarded the best presentation prize, both by peers and by an external jury ("For a project with a clearly defined value proposition, where
the engineering features were clear and tested, with a well thought out and articulated plan, a solution ready to go, and a team that presented seamlessly.

I had chosen to apply to the S2DS bootcamp in order to explore career options in data science and to acquire, through the project work, valuable commercial experience. I had also considered the great potential for networking with mentors both from Pivigo and the partner companies, possible employers, and fellow PhDs going through similar career paths.

My participation was fruitful in all of the aspects above. I developed my transferable skills, especially teamwork, leadership and communication; gained non-academic work experience in a fast-paced commercial setting; and expanded my professional network greatly, especially in the data science and technology areas.

As a result of this experience, I am more aware of career options available outside of academia and what to do in order to access them. I would advise any CM-CdT to do an industrial placement, even if that is late into their PhD (I have participated in S2DS over the last couple of months of my PhD).

Finally, I would like to thank the CM-CdT for funding my accommodation and living stipend during the program, Pivigo for the organisation and mentoring, and MADE.COM (as well as all other industrial partners) for funding the program.