Emilie interview transcript

LM: Hiya, thanks so much for agreeing to do this Interview.

ES: Hi, no problem.

LM: So, Tell me a little bit about yourself. Name, what you’re studying for your PhD.

ES: So I'm Emily. I’m doing my PhD, I just did my first year now based at SEI. And my PhD is about climate change impacts on trade and how trade can transmit those across the world.

LM: So, what have you studied previously to get to the point where you are now doing PhD?

ES: Yeah, I started off doing geography as an undergraduate and then I took a few years, a couple of years I think, doing a bit of work in some market research consultancy to start with. And then I did a few internships in something a bit more related to what SEI does. So worked for a few months in a think tank in London and I did some work with a charity abroad. Then, after that, I realised I need to come back to studying and did, so I came back to York to do environmental economics and environmental management in the Environment Department at the University of York. Yeah at that stage I then kind of new that SEI and I did my dissertation with SEI, and then afterwards I worked for SEI as research assistant and finally started my PhD a year ago.

LM: Well, that is quite the journey.

ES: It's not like this straight forward like undergrads, masters, PhD. But yeah, there’s lots of ways of getting to PhD. In some ways it's been useful cause I feel like I knew at that point I definitely wanted a PhD and had a bit of experience in different places, so when you kind of got into the work ethic of a nine to five job as well, which just been helpful when you're doing a PhD, a lot of the time working on your own and having to set your own deadlines and things like that. Yeah yeah, but I think a lot of people have SEI actually have come like come from a variety of different routes, but there are a few PhD students who have worked before doing a PhD as well.

LM: What attracted you to SCI in the first place?

ES: Yeah, I started off, so when I was doing an internship for another environmental think tank I knew that I really enjoyed doing that kind of work, so I wanted to look around and see what what other things they might be, perhaps not based in London, because yeah, I prefer living in smaller cities so SEI came up and it also came up because it's really highly rated environmental think tank. I think it's #2 in the world currently so it’s well regarded and respected, but also the topic areas really closely to, like it includes some topics that was related to my interests, so looking at agricultural trade with environmental impacts of that. And and yeah, then when I started working here and getting to know the other people here, it’s a super friendly environment and yeah people are good at what they do and I will say you have a healthy work/life balance which is important as well. Yeah, all these things.

LM: So, the ranking of SCI has come up quite a bit during these interviews. Has it lived up to his expectations?

ES: Yeah, I would say. I think. I don't know what my expectations would be of a highly ranked like environmental think tank. I guess, for me it's quite clear that SEI is involved in a lot of like policy processes so there's a lot of impacts that achieves. It definitely is, like, feeding into like real world decision making and things like that, so I think that's where that has lived up to its expectations.

LM: So, what is your overall experience, kind of, working and studying here.

ES: Well, I think… hard to sum up in a few words that big of a question. I think like I said before, I think it's got a really good balance of doing some like important work and like achieving, like its big aims of really helping to bridge science and policy, and it's kind of yeah, really working quite actively in those areas that is researching in on but it's also, it doesn't feel like a very high-pressure environment. There are other kind of workplaces I've been in that has a bit more of a stressful feel to them. Or yeah, maybe less friendly. I think SEI York has that really good balance being a place that does really good, really high-quality research, but also recognises that it's nice to be friendly and have a bit of a, you know, a good balance there.

LM: What would you say has been the standout experience for you?

ES: Yeah, that's a good question, I would say. I don’t know if it was the standout experience but it was quite cool as well as doing my literature review and and learning about the history of the IPCC and UN processes for climate change, and I realised actually that SEI, it kind of came out of one of the first environmental conferences across the world. So it was really there, like right at the start of this whole process that I’m researching. And yeah, it was quite cool to discover and to realise that I'm now part of it. Like yeah decades later and, right, yeah, I think that was one of the moments where I was like oh wow that's really cool, it’s really nice to be part of that.

LM: Yeah, that is really cool. So if you have to kind of summarise SCI in three words, what would they be?

ES: I’d probably say bridging science and policy. That's kind of four words. That's why SEI is doing making those two things.

LM: It is four words, but I will let you off don’t worry.

ES: Thank you.

LM: OK, see the final section is: if you were speaking someone who is thinking about applying to SEI, what would you say to them?

ES: Yeah, I would say definitely do it. I would say try and, you know, have a look at the website and see. I guess it depends what the what their interests are and so that's one thing I guess making sure that there's, that your area is covered in SEI York and making sure you're going to be working with people who, yeah, have experience on that topic that you're interested in and reach out. I think everyone's happy to respond to people, if there's am interested PhD student it might be nice to have a chat and get a feel for whether or not the right place for you and yeah I would really encourage it and also York is a really great place to live so yeah.

LM: Thank you, would you have any advice for them?

ES: In terms of someone thinking about doing a PhD?

LM: Yeah.

ES: Is that yeah. Yeah, I think I guess similar to what I said before in terms of, do reach out and feel free to have a chat with people who might be a potential supervisor and because it's really important to know that you get along that you work well together. Yeah, make sure it's a topic that you enjoy doing and you have a lot of freedom when choosing to do a PhD often and yeah. Research a very specific topic that you're really interested in, so make the most of that freedom and yeah, find your niche and what you're really interested in. And I guess, yeah, take your time to find the PhD that really fits your interests and where you want to be and the right supervisor so, yeah, make sure that that's aligned. Then you have the best chance is to have a really good three or four years.

LM: And then the final question for you, and I have to warn you is a tricky one, it’s thrown a few people - what's your favourite colour?

ES: Red.

LM: Red? You said that with confidence. I like it.

ES: I can’t really explain it but that’s the answer I’m going with.

LM: Brilliant, thank you very much. That is all the questions I have for you. If you have anything else that you want to add. Just kind of anything that you think someone applying to do a PhD should really know or anything you think you've missed. Now is the time to say.

ES: Can't really think of anything, but yeah, what I haven't really talked about that much is about York the city and yeah, it's such a really nice really nice place to live. I guess during Covid it’s been a bit difficult like everywhere. Generally there's a lot of culture for its size, but you can cycle everywhere and I think that's like another component that you have to think about when you're starting a new job, or a new PhD somewhere so yeah, make sure the place is right for you.

LM: Brilliant, thank you so much. That is everything for me then.

ES: Thank you.

LM: Thank you again. I'll let you get back to your PhD

ES: Thank you.

LM: Bye.