



DKAN0011A

Setting Up a Nios II System with SDRAM on the DE2

04 November 2009

Introduction

This tutorial details how to set up and instantiate a Nios II system on Terasic Technologies, Inc.'s DE2 Altera Development and Education Board. The system includes an interface to the board's 8MB SDRAM chip and runs the application program from SDRAM. It also sets up and implements the LCD, seven-segment displays, red and green LEDs, switches, and pushbuttons.

Background

Nios II is a 32-bit RISC CPU designed for implementation as a soft core in Altera FPGAs. Altera's System-on-a-Programmable-Chip (SOPC) Builder allows users to design Nios II systems easily by selecting Nios II processors, setting up the associated memory, and adding any desired standard and/or custom peripherals. Once generated, the system is incorporated into an FPGA design with Altera's Quartus II software and instantiated on the FPGA.

Altera provides the Nios II Integrated Development Environment (IDE) for application software development. This tutorial includes instructions for running an example C application from SDRAM.

Application

DE2 Setup

This tutorial assumes that the user is familiar with the DE2 board and already has the USB-Blaster device installed. Refer to the *Getting Started with Altera's DE2 Board* tutorial for more information on installing the USB-Blaster driver.

Also, these programs are case sensitive. If a component is named or renamed, it needs to match what is written in this tutorial exactly, or it may not work.

Starting a New Project in Quartus II

Open the Quartus II software and create a new project by selecting **File > New Project Wizard**. Create a new folder on the C:\ drive called **Tutorial_Files** and create another folder inside of that one called **SDRAM**. Specify the **SDRAM** folder as the working directory for this project. Also, in the second box, call the project name **SDRAM**. The top level entity on the third line automatically fills in. See Figure 1.

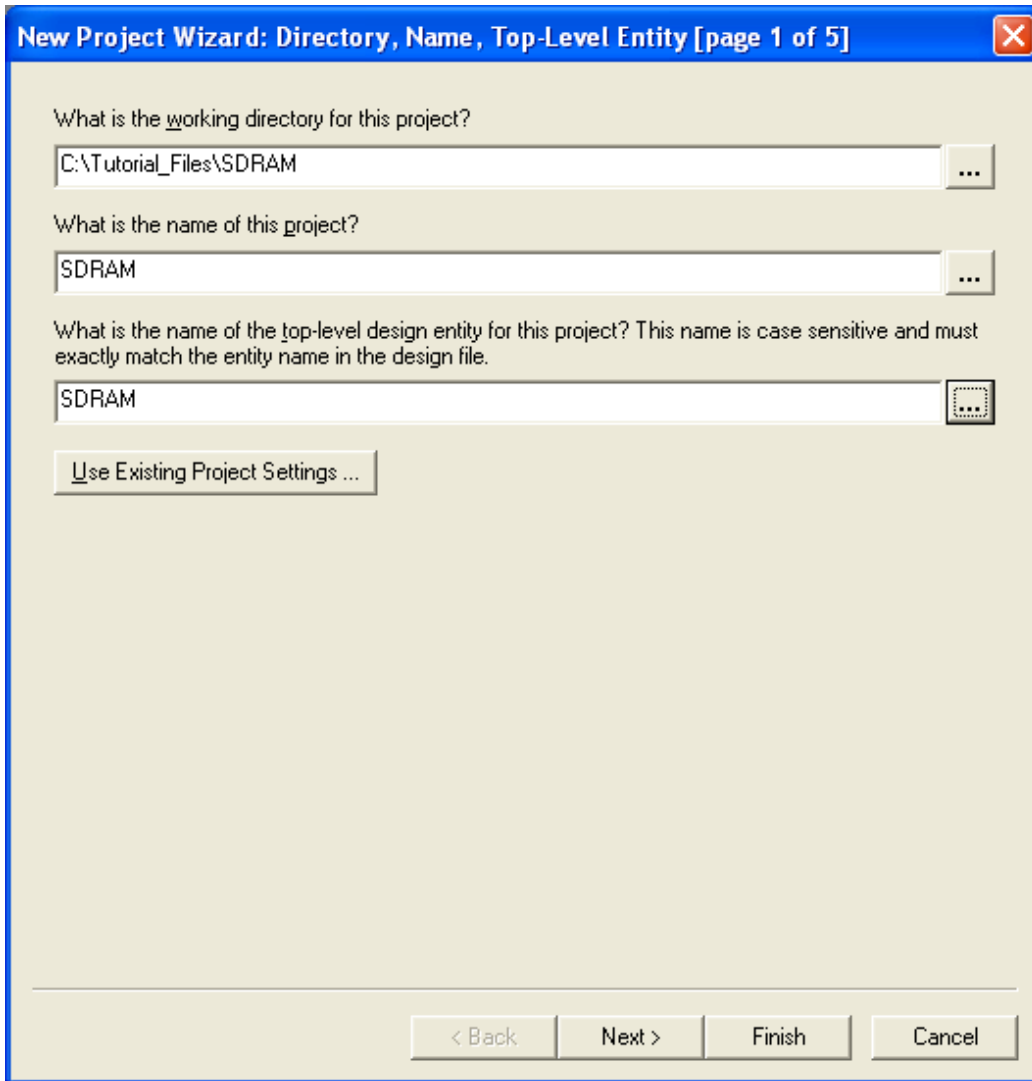


Figure 1. New Project Wizard

Make sure the new folders were created directly on the C:\ drive and that there are no spaces in the folder names. This ensures that there are no spaces in the directory path. Folders created in the My Documents folder cause errors. For instance, *C:\Documents and Settings\Firstname_Lastname\My Documents* causes an error because of the spaces in the directory path.

Click the **Next** button, and click **Next** again on page 2. On the third page, select the **EP2C35F672C6** chip as the target device, as shown in Figure 2. This is the FPGA on the DE2 board. Click **Next** on the remaining two screens, and click **Finish**.

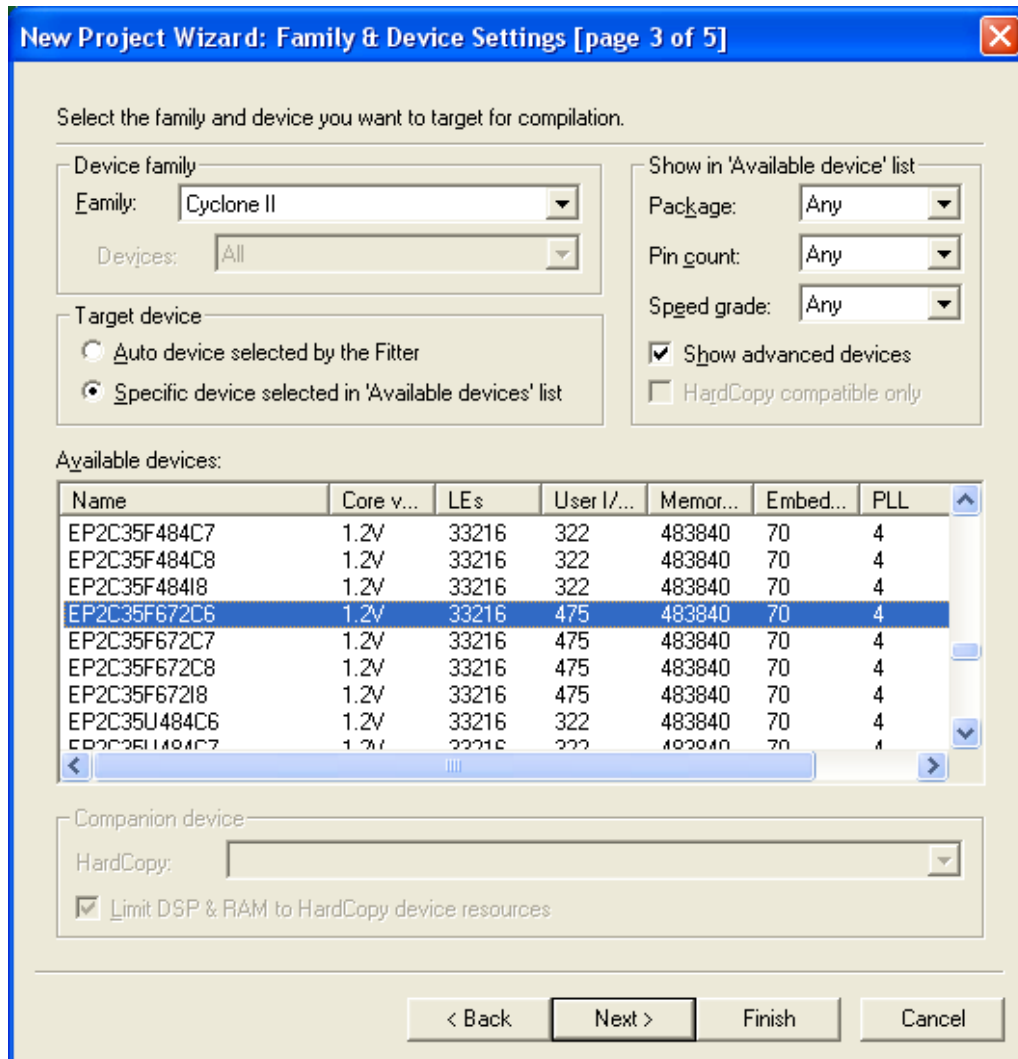


Figure 2. FPGA Selection

Create a new block diagram by selecting **File > New**, selecting **Block Diagram/Schematic File**, and clicking **OK**. To save this file, select **File > Save As** (not to be confused with Save Project), call it **SDRAM**, and click **Save**. Naming it **SDRAM** ensures that this block diagram file is the top most entity of the project, as specified in Figure 1.

Nios II System Design in SOPC Builder

The next step is to build a Nios II processor system. Select **Tools > SOPC Builder**. In the pop-up window, set the **System Name** to **NiosII_Processor** and the **Target HDL** to either **Verilog** or **VHDL**. Select **OK**. It is not necessary to know VHDL or Verilog to continue, so select either one. Refer to Figure 3.

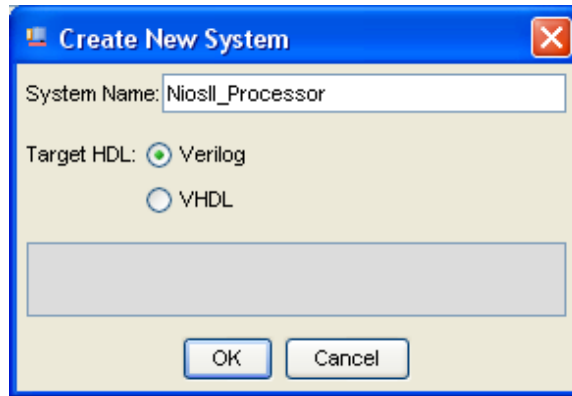


Figure 3. Create New Nios II System

Error and warning messages appear and disappear sporadically in the information box on the bottom of the screen while performing the following steps. Ignore these errors; they disappear upon successful completion of the Nios II system.

Clock Settings

In the **Clock Settings** pane, double click **clk_0**, and rename it **CLOCK_50**. Press **Enter**. The SDRAM requires another clock to be added to the system, so click the **Add** button to the right of the **Clock Settings** pane. Once a new clock appears, double-click on it and rename it **CLOCK_100**. To the right of this new clock, under **MHz**, double-click on the **50**, and change it to **100**. Refer to Figure 4.

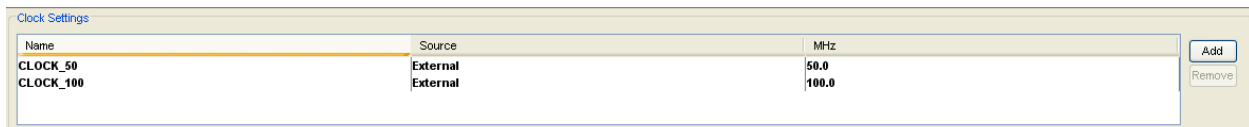


Figure 4. External System Clocks

Add On Chip Memory

On the upper left side of the SOPC Builder window, under **Component Library**, expand the **Memories and Memory Controllers** column, then expand **On-Chip**, and select **On-Chip Memory (RAM or ROM)**. Click the **Add** button and the MegaWizard appears.

Set **Block Type** to **M4K**, set **Total Memory Size** to **20**, and select **Kbytes**. Do not change any other default settings. Click **Finish**. Refer to Figure 5.

Errors may occur after adding the On-chip memory. Ignore these errors, because they disappear as more components are added to the system.

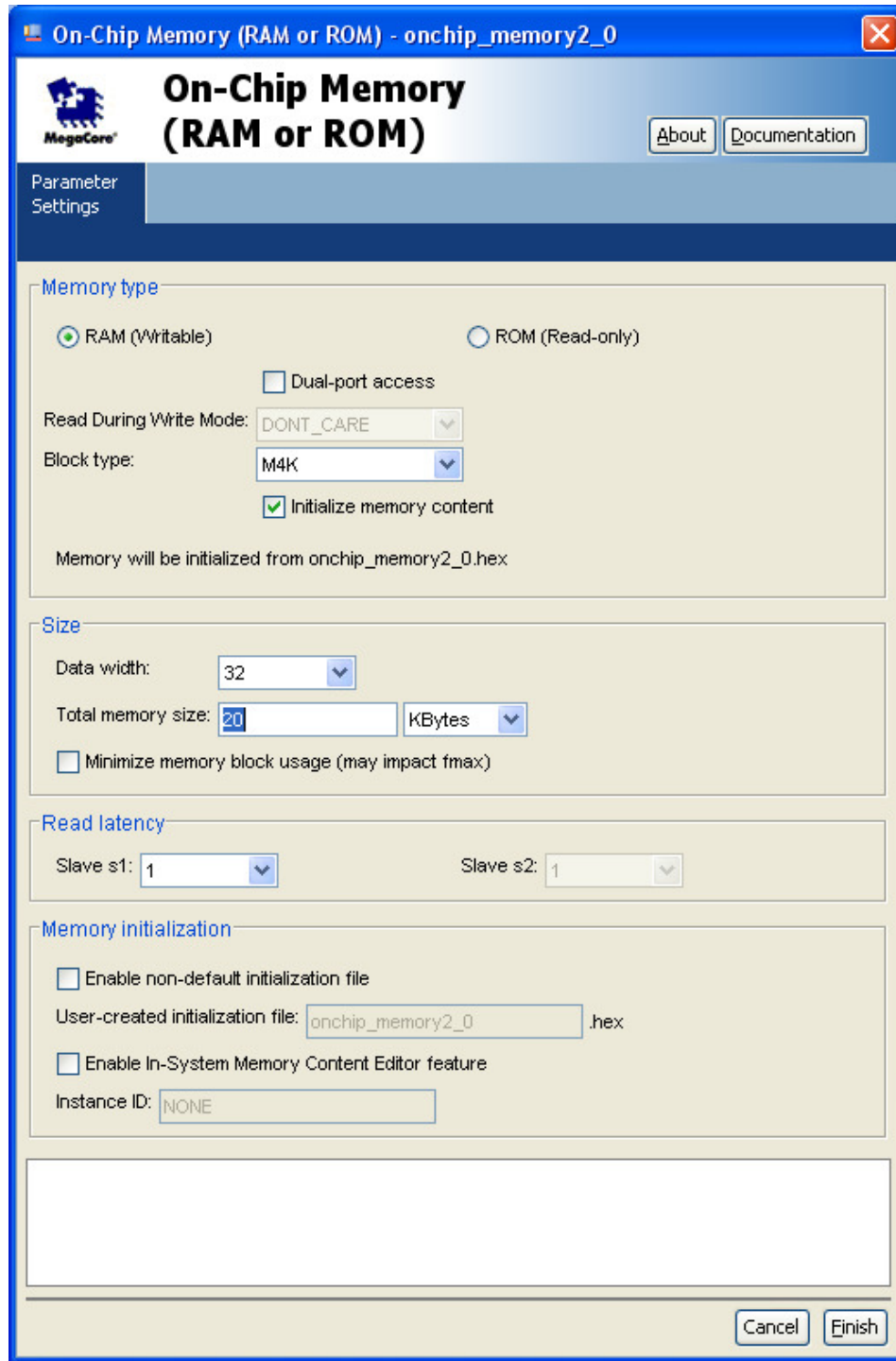


Figure 5. On-Chip Memory Setup

Add a Nios II Processor

Now, add the Nios II processor to the system. In the upper left corner of the SOPC window, under **Component Library**, select **Nios II Processor**, and click the **Add** button.

In the middle of the MegaWizard window, select **Nios II/s** as a Nios II core. Set **Hardware Multiply** to **None**. Do not change any other of the default values. Click **Finish** and the Nios II processor is added to the system. See Figure 6.

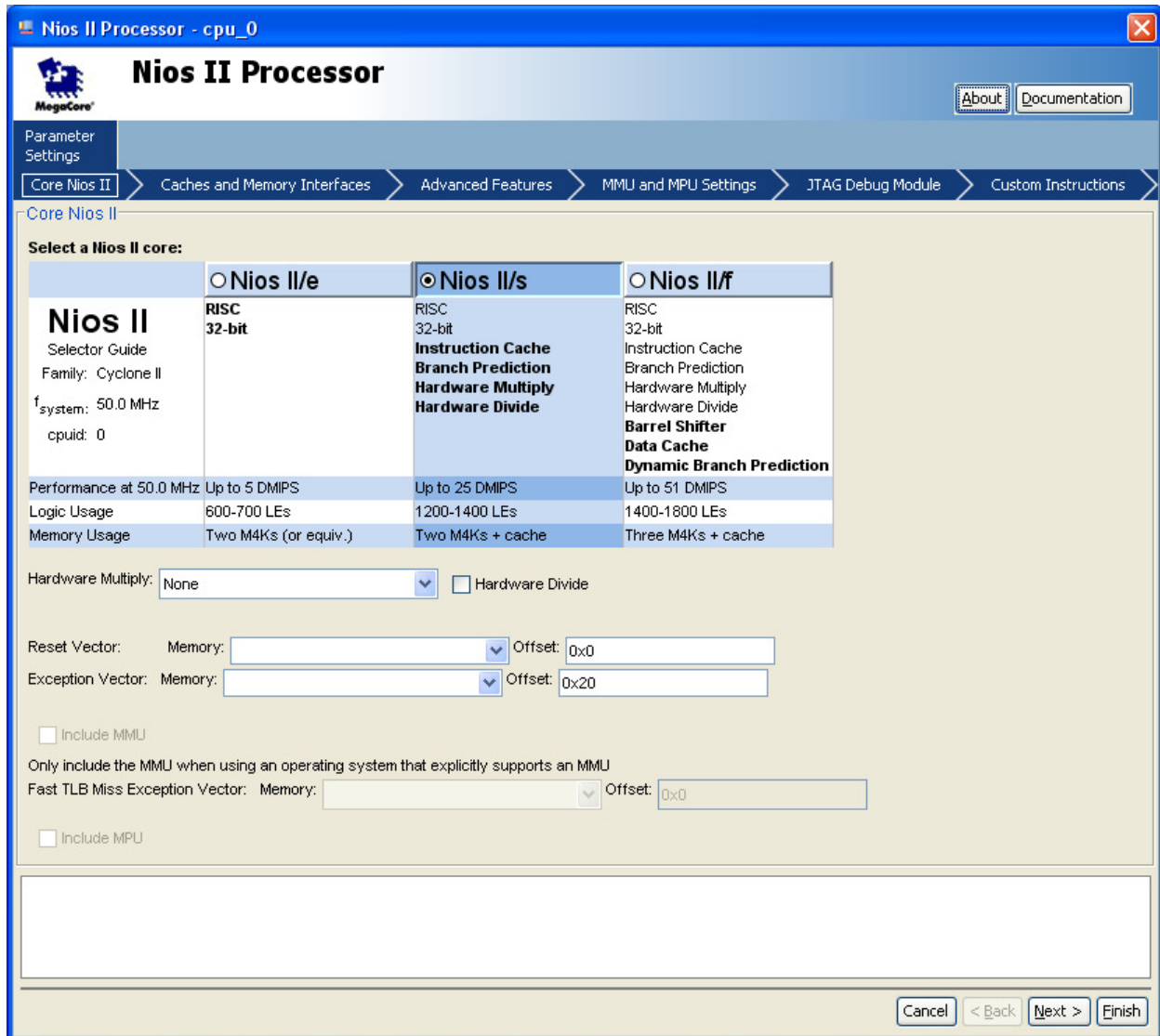


Figure 6. Nios II Processor Setup

Add a JTAG UART

In order to communicate to the Nios II processor through the USB-Blaster, add the JTAG UART to the system. In the upper left corner of the SOPC window, under **Component Library**, expand **Interface Protocols**, expand **Serial**, select **JTAG UART**, and click **Add**. Do not change any of the default settings. Click **Finish**. Refer to Figure 7.

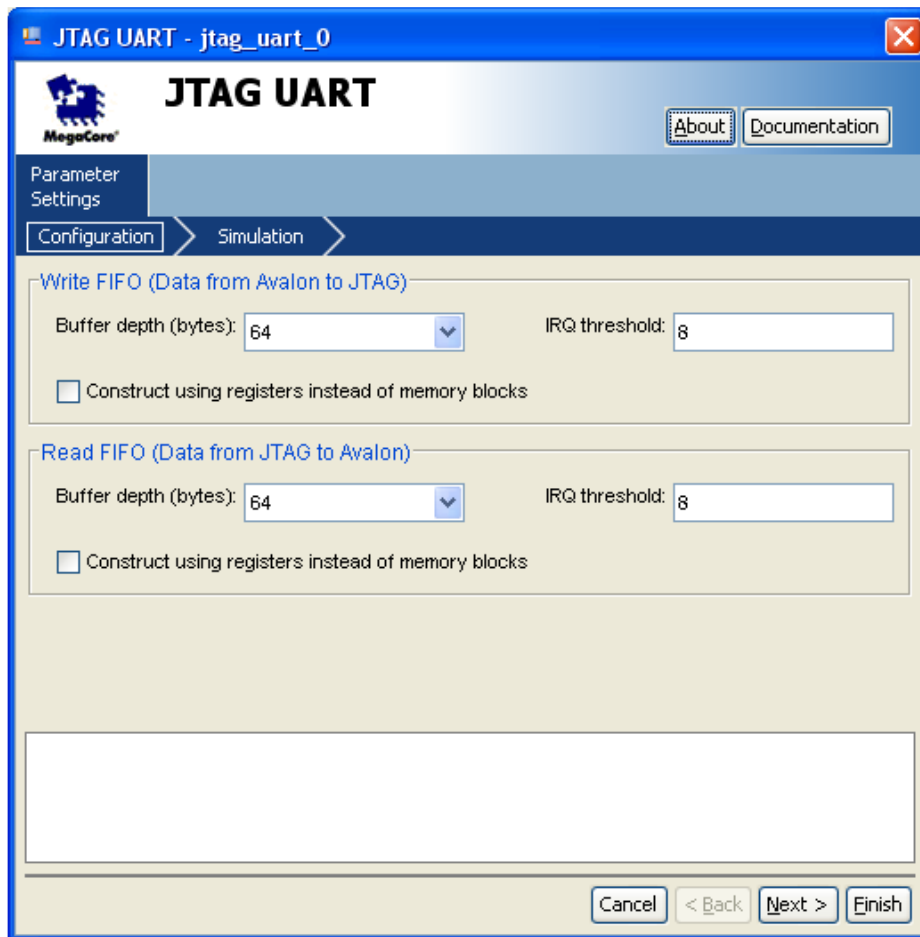


Figure 7. JTAG UART Setup

Add an LCD

To add the LCD, expand **Peripherals**, then expand **Display**, select **Character LCD**, and click **Add**. There are no settings to modify, so select **Finish**. Refer to Figure 8.

Rename the **lcd_0** that was generated to ensure proper functionality. Select **lcd_0**, right-click on it, select **Rename**, rename it to **lcd**, and press **Enter**.

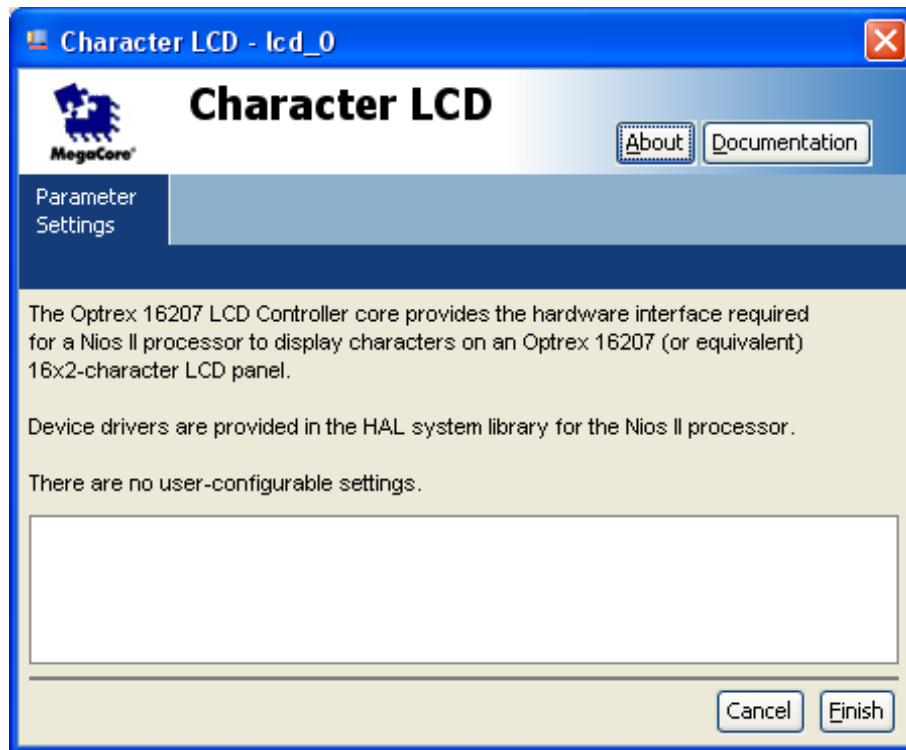


Figure 8. LCD Controller Setup

Add Parallel I/O (PIO)

Add switches to the system. Expand **Peripherals**, then expand **Microcontroller Peripherals**, select **PIO (Parallel I/O)**, and click **Add**. When the window opens, set the **Width** to **18**, set the **Direction** to **input ports only**, and click **Finish**. Refer to Figure 9.

Rename the **pio_0** that was generated to ensure proper functionality. Select **pio_0**, right-click on it, select **Rename**, rename it to **switch**, and press **Enter**.

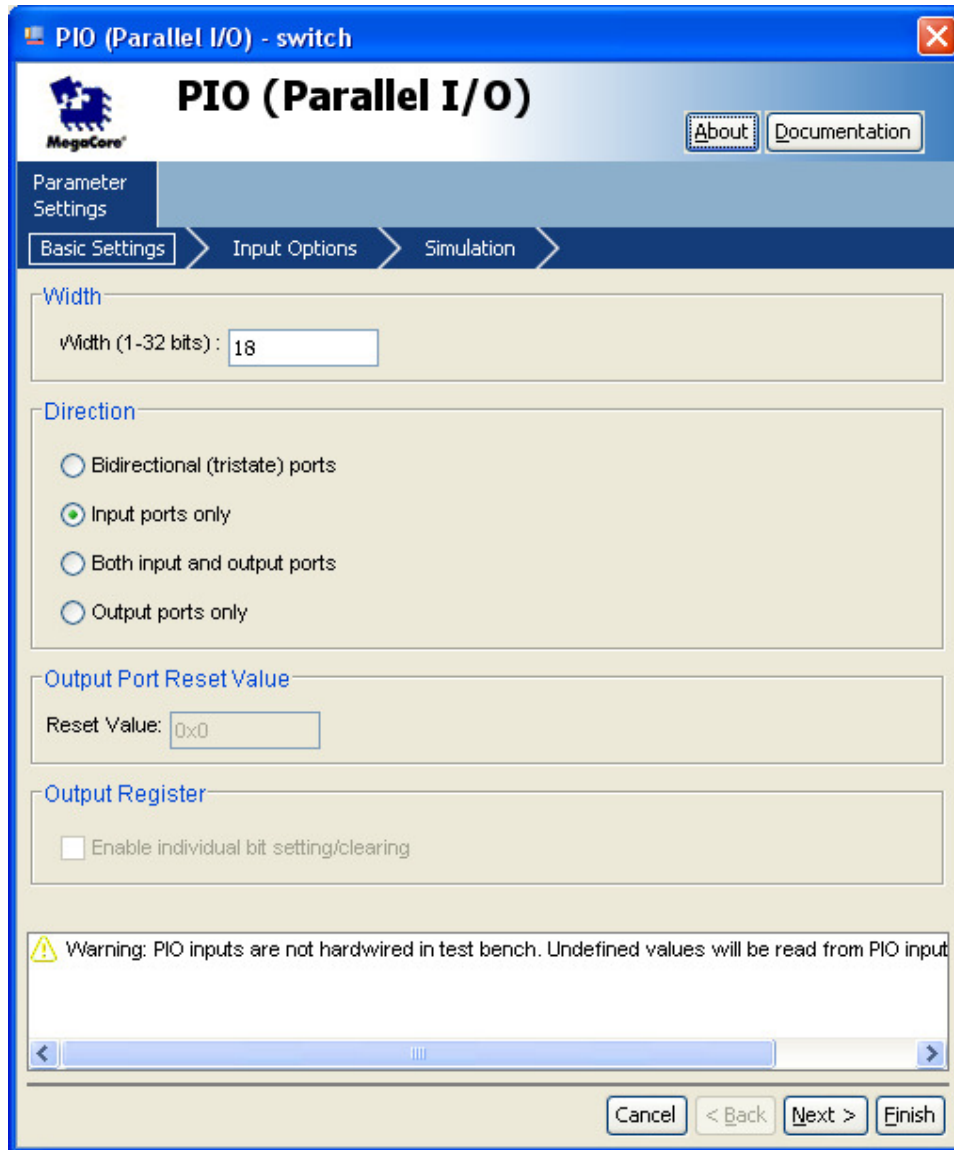


Figure 9. PIO Switch Setup

Add the pushbuttons next. Similar to the switches, expand **Peripherals**, expand **Microcontroller Peripherals**, select **PIO (Parallel I/O)**, and click **Add**. When the window opens, set the **Width** to **4** and set the **Direction** to **input ports only**. Go to the **Input Options** tab, check the **synchronously capture box**, and select **Falling edge**. Also, underneath in the **Interrupt** section, check **Generate IRQ**, select **Edge**, and then click **Finish**. Refer to Figures 10 and 11.

Rename the **pio_0** that was generated to ensure proper functionality. Select **pio_0**, right-click on it, select **Rename**, rename it to **pb**, and press **Enter**.



Figure 10. PIO Pushbutton Setup

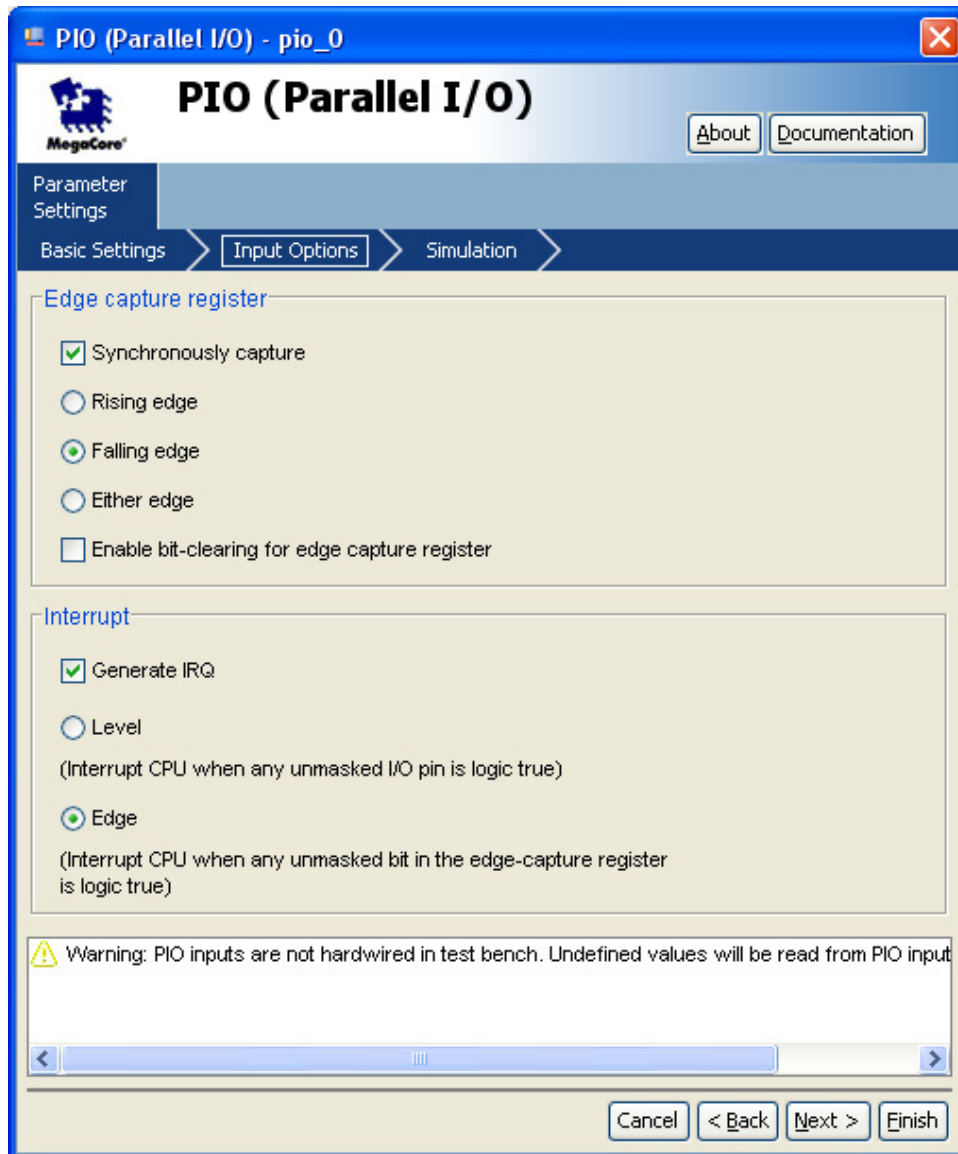


Figure 11. PIO Pushbutton Interrupt Setup

The green LEDs are added next. Expand **Peripherals**, expand **Microcontroller Peripherals**, select **PIO (Parallel I/O)**, and click **Add**. Do not change any of the default settings. The interface is set up for an 8-bit output-only PIO, which is needed to use the green LEDs. Click **Finish**. Refer to Figure 12.

To ensure proper functionality, rename the **pio_0** that was generated. Select **pio_0**, right-click on it, select **Rename**, rename it to **ledg**, and press **Enter**.

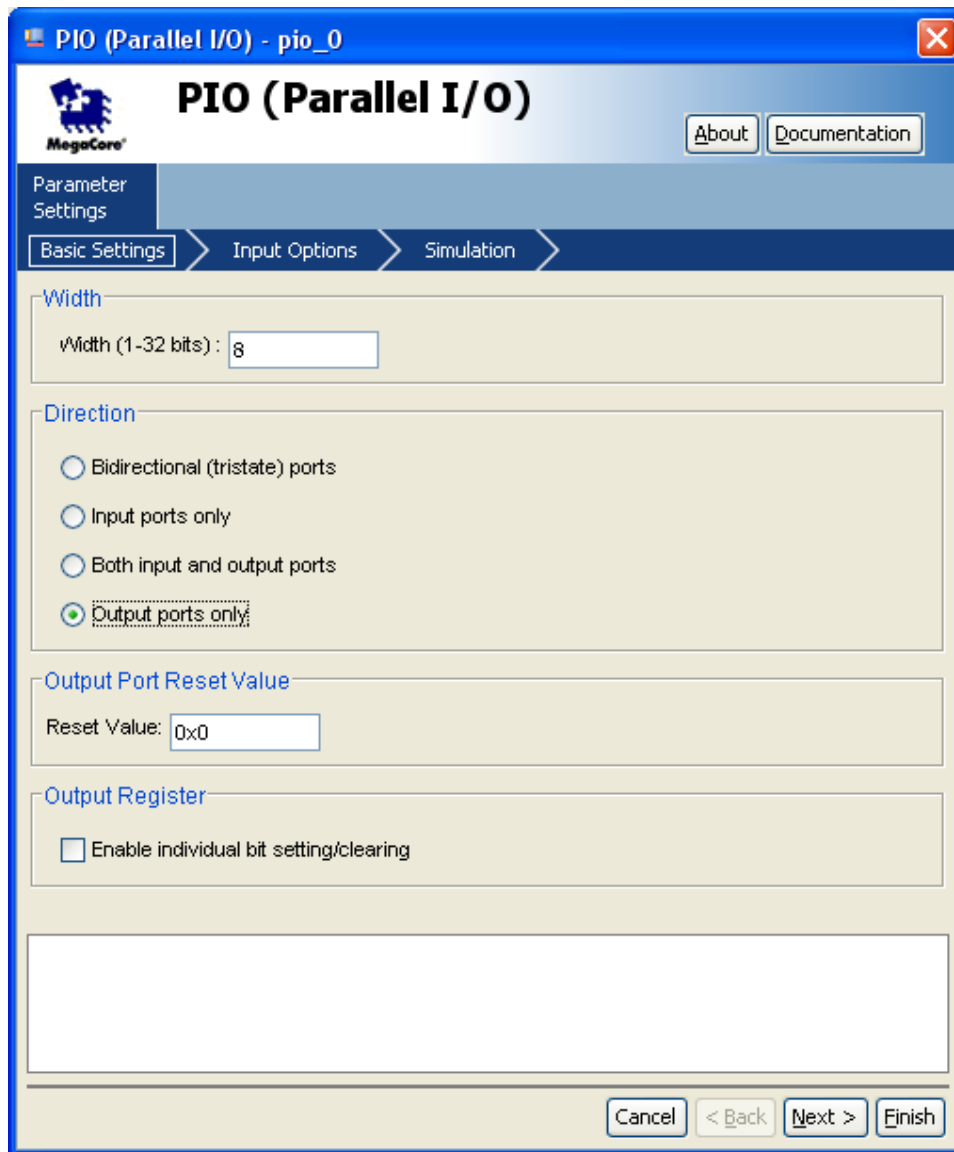


Figure 12. PIO Green LED Setup

Add the red LEDs next. Expand **Peripherals**, expand **Microcontroller Peripherals**, select **PIO (Parallel I/O)**, and click **Add**. Set the **Width** to **18** and click **Finish**. Refer to Figure 13.

To ensure proper functionality, rename the **pio_0** that was generated. Select **pio_0**, right-click on it, select **Rename**, rename it to **ledr**, and press **Enter**.

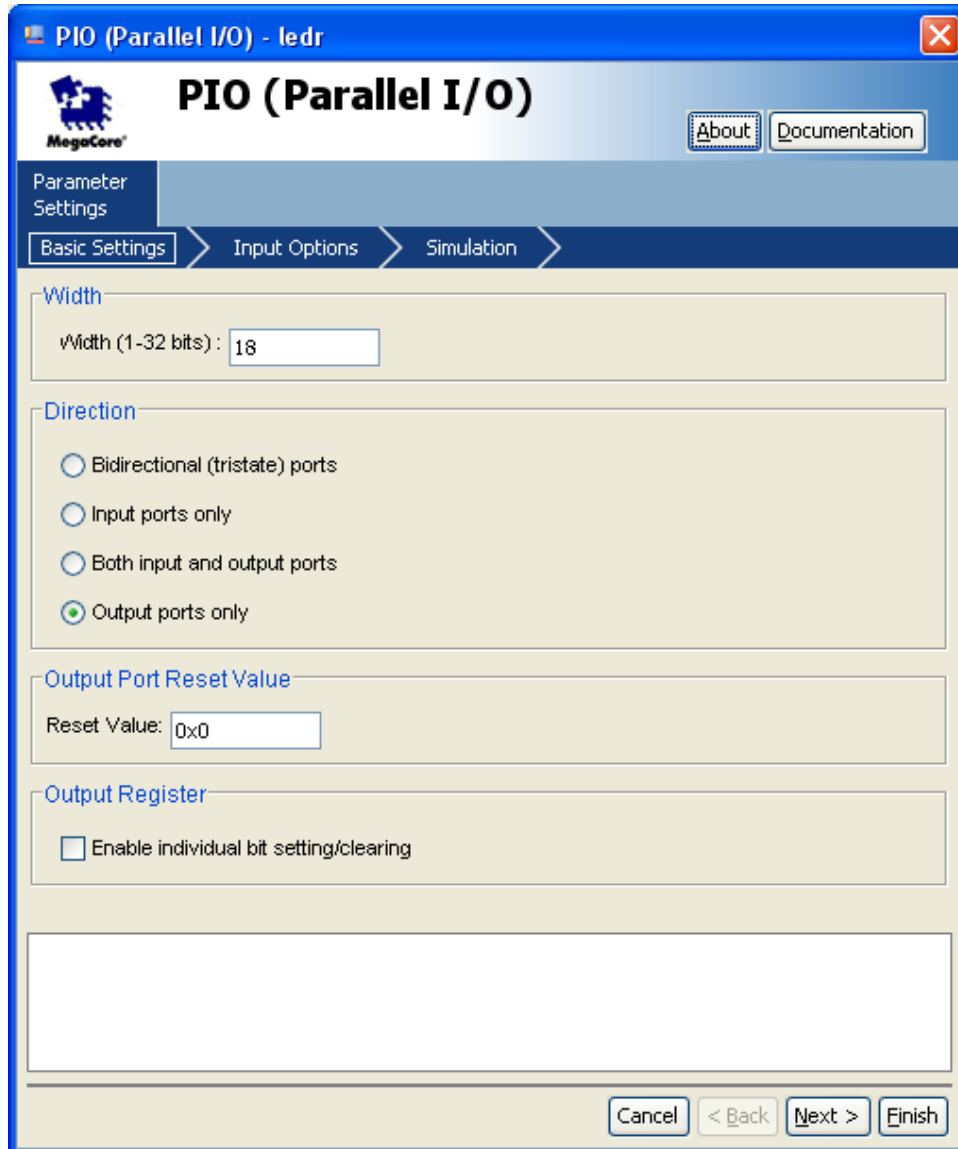


Figure 13. PIO Red LED Setup

Add the seven-segment displays to the system. Expand **Peripherals**, expand **Microcontroller Peripherals**, select **PIO (Parallel I/O)**, and click **Add**. Set the **Width** to **16** and click **Finish**.

Repeat the previous step three more times to set up all eight of the seven-segment displays. Refer to Figure 14.

To ensure proper functionality, rename the **pio_0-3** that were generated. Select **pio_0-3**, right-click on them, select **Rename**, and rename them to **seven_seg_01**, **seven_seg_23**, **seven_seg_45**, and **seven_seg_67**.

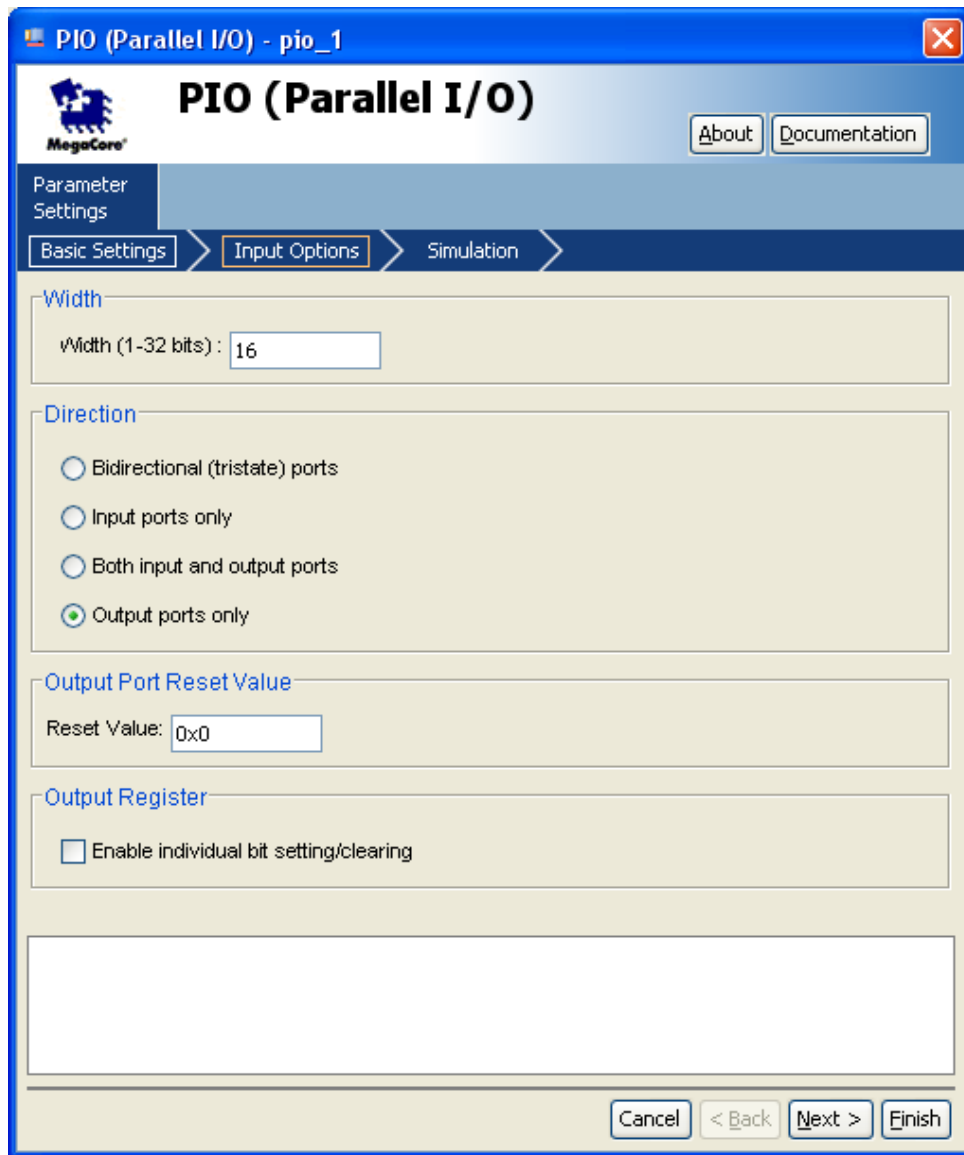


Figure 14. PIO Seven-Segment Display Setup

Add SDRAM

To add the SDRAM, expand **Memories and Memory Controllers**, expand **SDRAM**, select **SDRAM Controller**, and click **Add**. Set **Presets:** to **Custom**, change the **Bits** to **16**, and click **Finish**. Do not change any of the other values. Refer to Figure 15.

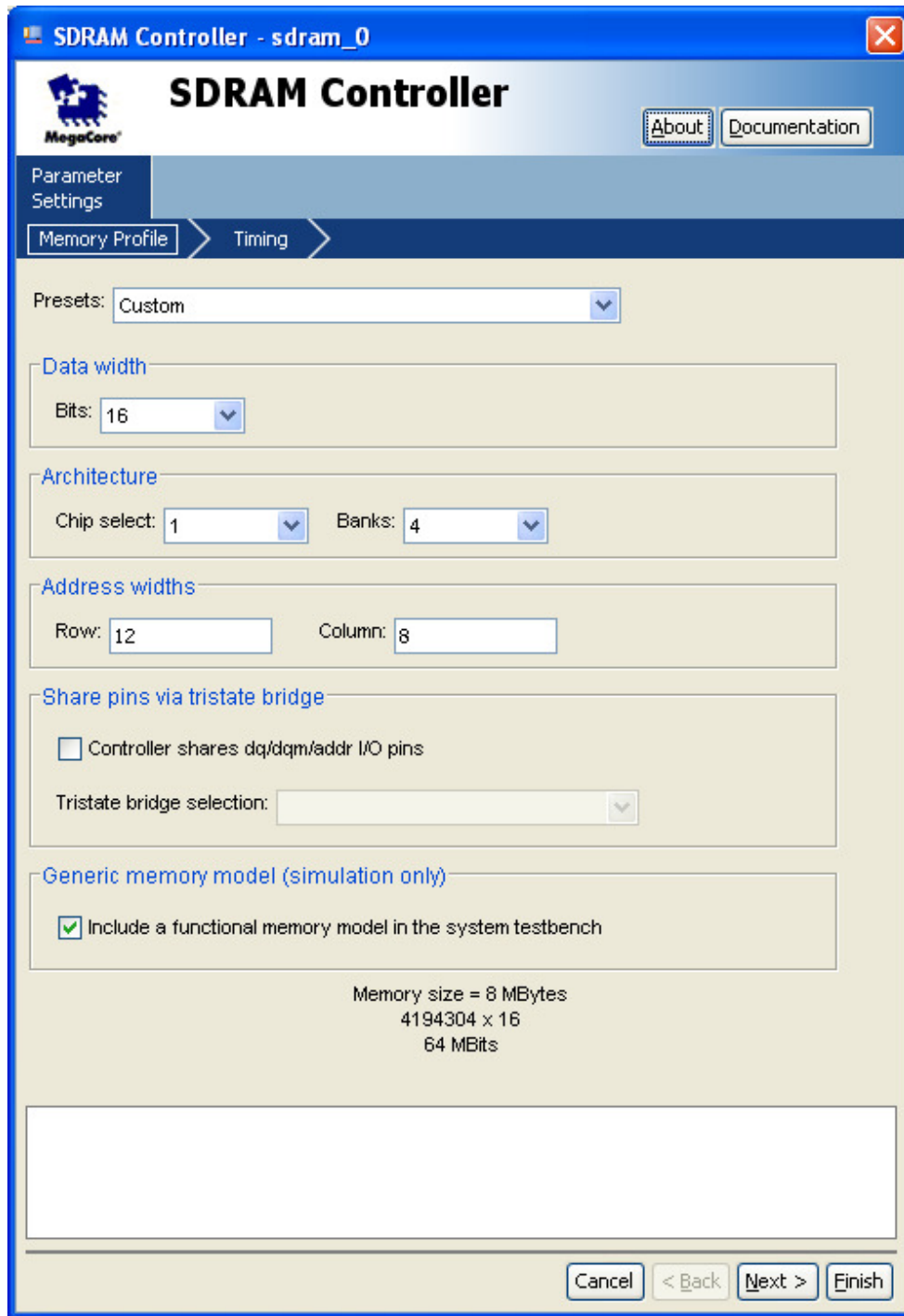


Figure 15. SDRAM Setup

The SDRAM operates at a different clock speed than the rest of the system. Under the **Clock** column, change the **sdram_0** clock to **CLOCK_50**. Do this by clicking on the **Clock_100** across from the SDRAM, and then choose **CLOCK_50** from the drop down menu. Refer to Figure 16.

Setting Up a Nios II System with SDRAM on the DE2

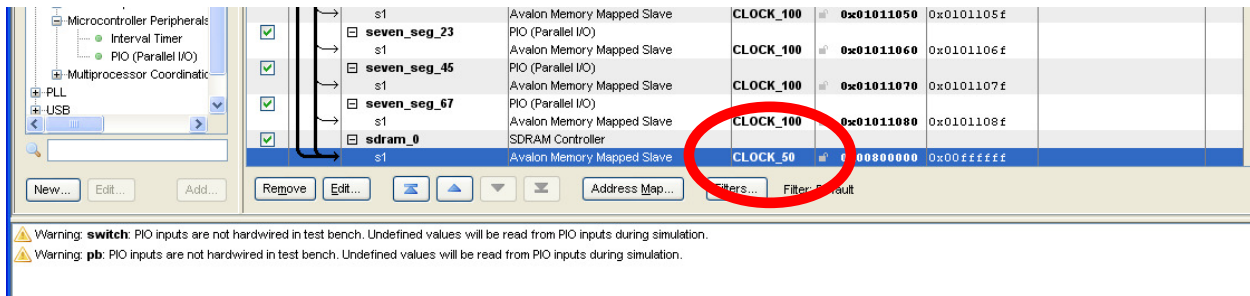


Figure 16. SDRAM CLOCK_50

To run the application from SDRAM instead of On-chip memory, specify it in the **cpu_0** MegaWizard. Select **cpu_0** in the Module Name list, right-click on it, and select **edit**. Set the **Reset Vector** and the **Expansion Vector** to **sdram_0** as shown in Figure 17. Select **Finish**.

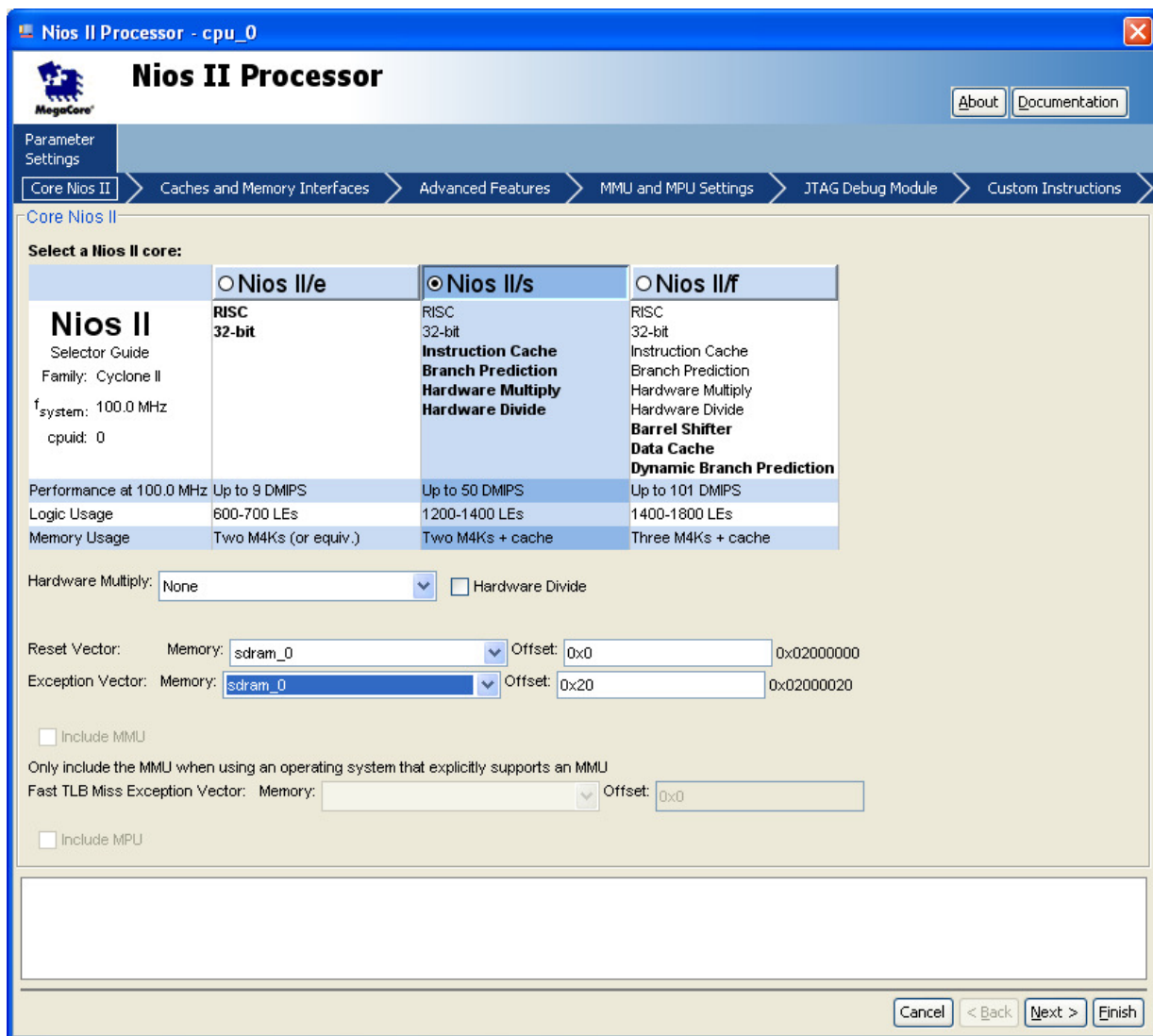


Figure 17. SDRAM Configuration

Assign Base Addresses

To avoid conflicts between system components, set their base addresses. To auto assign the base addresses, select **System > Auto-Assign Base Addresses**. Refer to Figure 18.

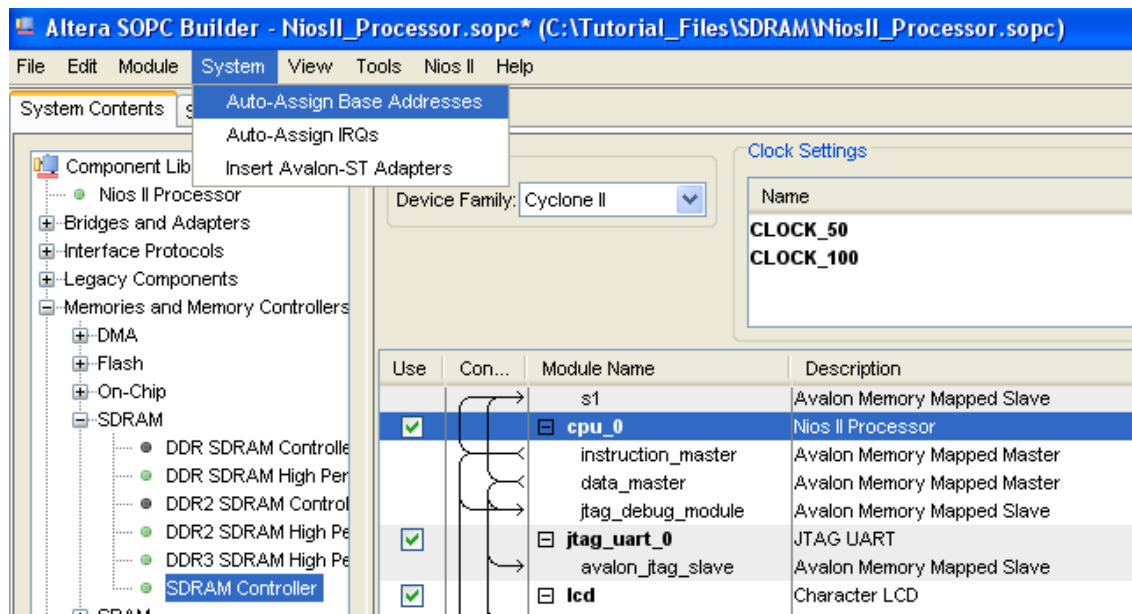


Figure 18. Auto-Assign Base Addresses

Change the interrupt request (IRQ) priorities for the JTAG UART. Click the **IRQ** value for the **jtag_uart_0** component to select it. Type **16**, and press **Enter** to assign it a new IRQ value. Refer to Figure 19.

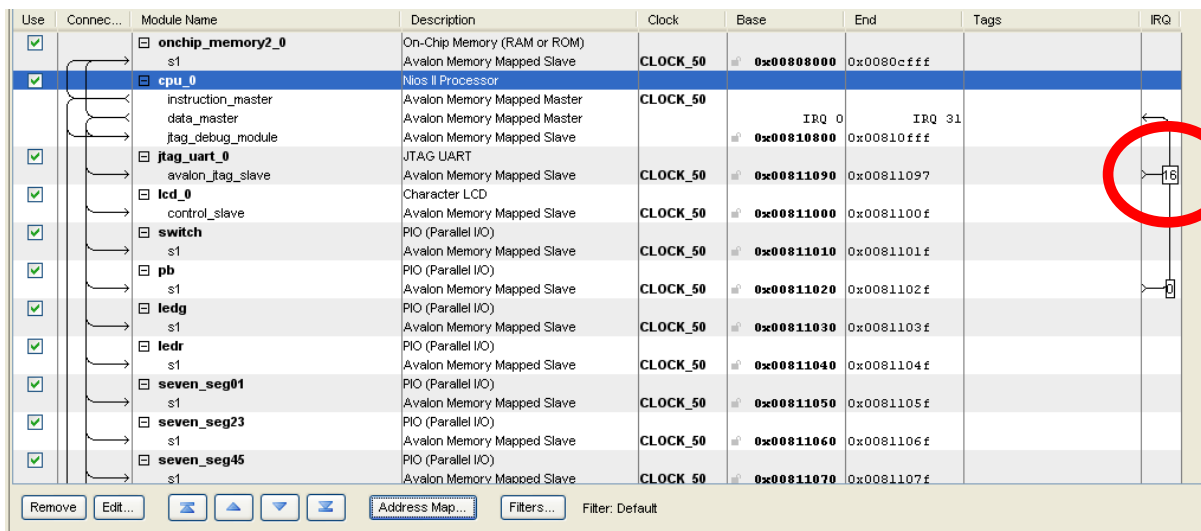


Figure 19. JTAG UART IRQ Setup

Generate System

Finally, generate the system. Click the **Generate** button on the bottom of the screen. If prompted to save the changes, do so. When the system generation is complete, a message entitled **Info: System generation was successful** appears in the message box. Upon successful system generation, close the SOPC Builder window.

Block Diagram Design in Quartus II

Add Processor

Now that the SOPC system is built, implement it in the block diagram file. Open the Quartus II window. Right-click on the blank block diagram within the **SDRAM.bdf** tab. Click **Insert > Symbol**. A **Symbol** window opens. In the **Libraries** pane, expand **Project**, select **NiosII_Processor**, and click **OK**. Refer to Figure 20.

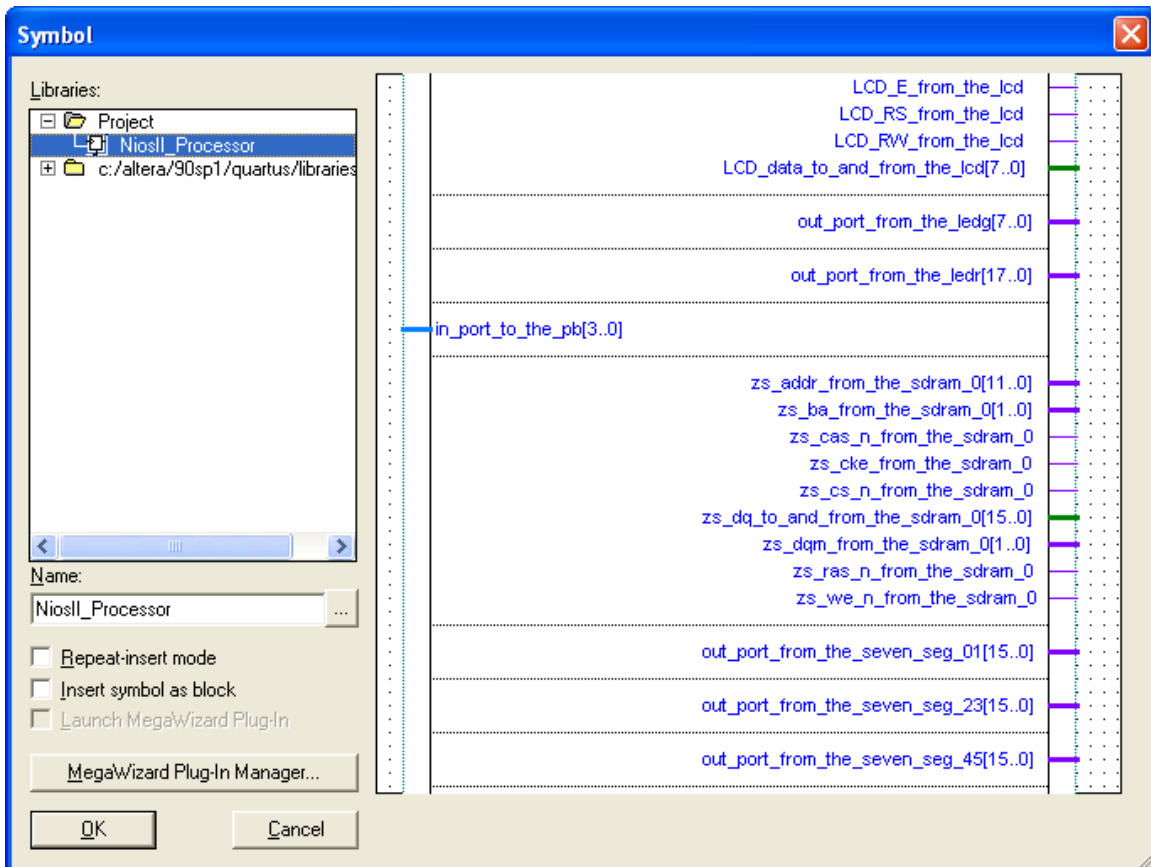


Figure 20. Insert Nios II Processor

Add VCC

Click to place the symbol somewhere in the block diagram window. Right-click on the block diagram window again, and click **Insert > Symbol**. Expand the **c:/altera/.../libraries** folder, expand **primitives**, expand **other**, select **vcc**, check the box labeled **Repeat-insert mode**, and click **OK**. Place **vcc** somewhere on the left side of the **NiosII_Processor** block near **reset_n**. Place another **vcc** somewhere on the bottom right side of the block. The initial placements of **vcc** are not important, as they can be moved later. Hit the **Esc** key on the keyboard after both instances of **vcc** are placed.

Add Output Pins

Right-click somewhere in the blank space again, and click **Insert > Symbol**. Expand the **c:/altera/.../libraries** folder, expand **primitives**, expand **pin**, and select **output**. Check the box called **Repeat-insert mode** and click **OK**. Place two output pins just below the **NiosII_Processor** block. After both output pins are placed, hit **Esc** on the keyboard.

Move the mouse to the blue line coming from **reset_n** on the block diagram. The mouse cursor should change into a cross-hair shape. When this happens, click and hold in order to draw a line connecting **reset_n** to the closest **vcc**. Let go of the mouse as soon as a small box shape appears on **vcc**.

Click and hold **vcc** in order to move it. When **vcc** is moved, the line that was just drawn follows **vcc**. If the line moves with **vcc**, there is a proper connection. If not, click and drag the mouse to connect the line between **reset_n** and **vcc**. Connect both of the output pins to the other **vcc** following these same steps.

Double-click one of the output pins to open the **Pin Properties** window. In the **Pin name(s):** section, rename the pin to **LCD_ON**, and click **OK**. Rename the other pin **LCD_BLON**. Refer to Figure 21.

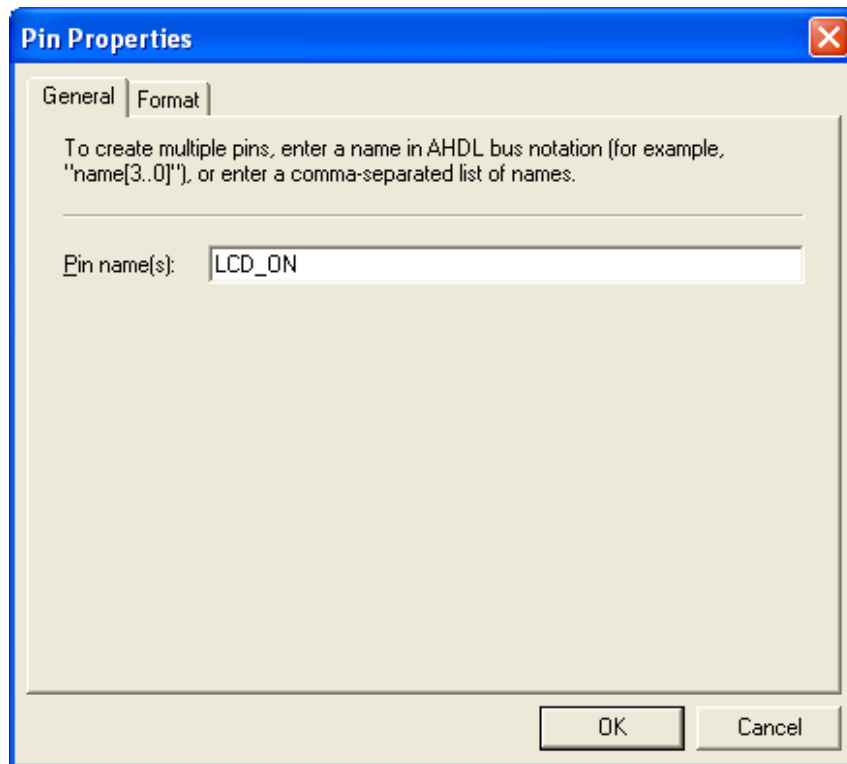


Figure 21. Rename Output Pins

Add a PLL

Right-click somewhere in the block diagram again, and click **Insert > Symbol**. Click on the **MegaWizard Plug-In Manager...** button. In the new window, select **Create a new custom megafunction variation**, and click **Next**. Refer to Figure 22.

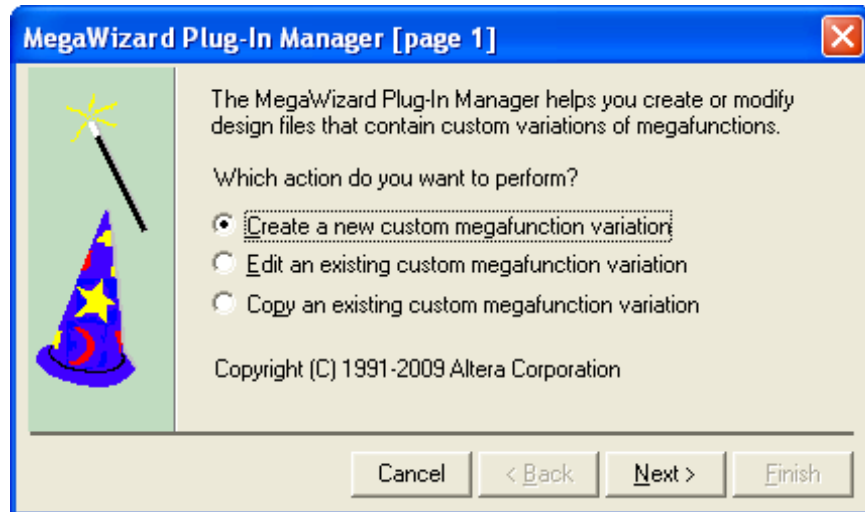


Figure 22. MegaWizard Plug-In Manager, Page 1

On the left side, under **Installed Plug-Ins**, expand **I/O** and click on **ALTPLL**. On the right side, where it asks for the name, browse to where the project is stored, and name it **pll_block**. If it was created on the C:\ drive as described in this tutorial, the path name should be *C:\Tutorial_Files\Test2\SDRAM\pll_block*. Click **Next**. Refer to Figure 23.

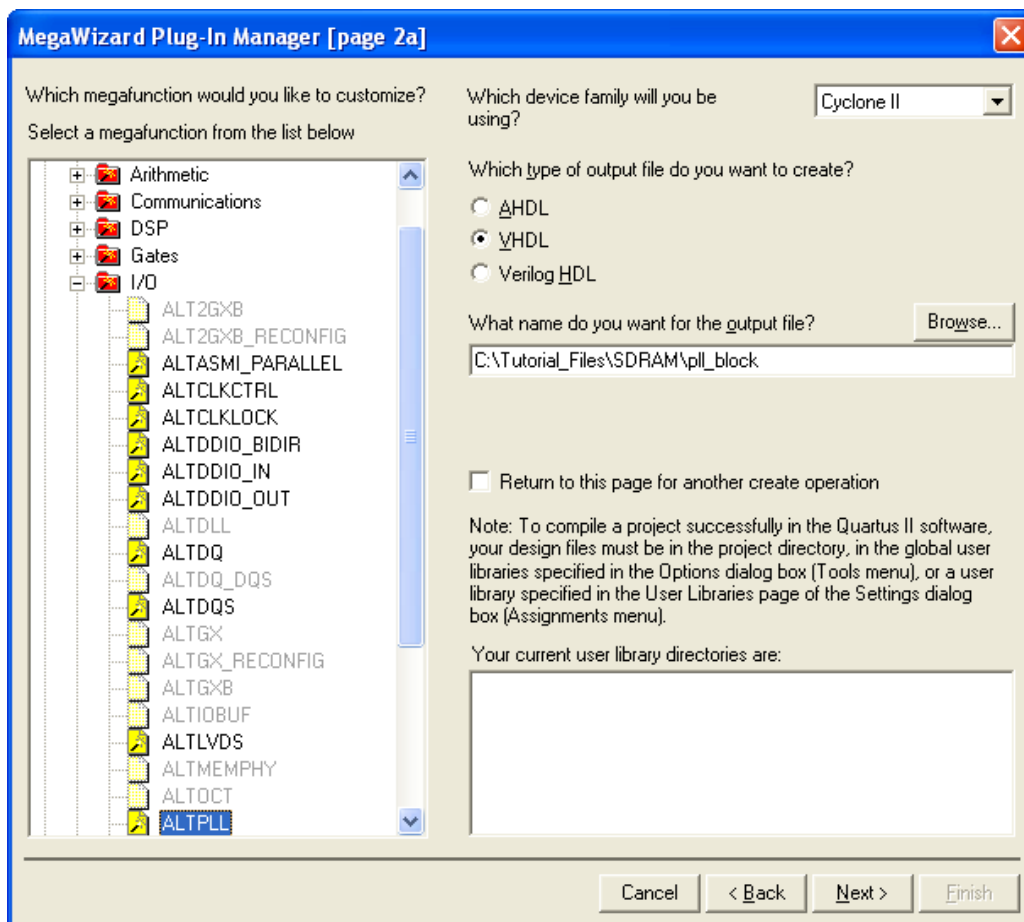


Figure 23. MegaWizard Plug-In Manager, Page 2

On the ALTPLL page, leave the speed grade set to **6**. Change the **frequency of the inclock0 input to 50 MHz**. Click **Next**. Refer to Figure 24.

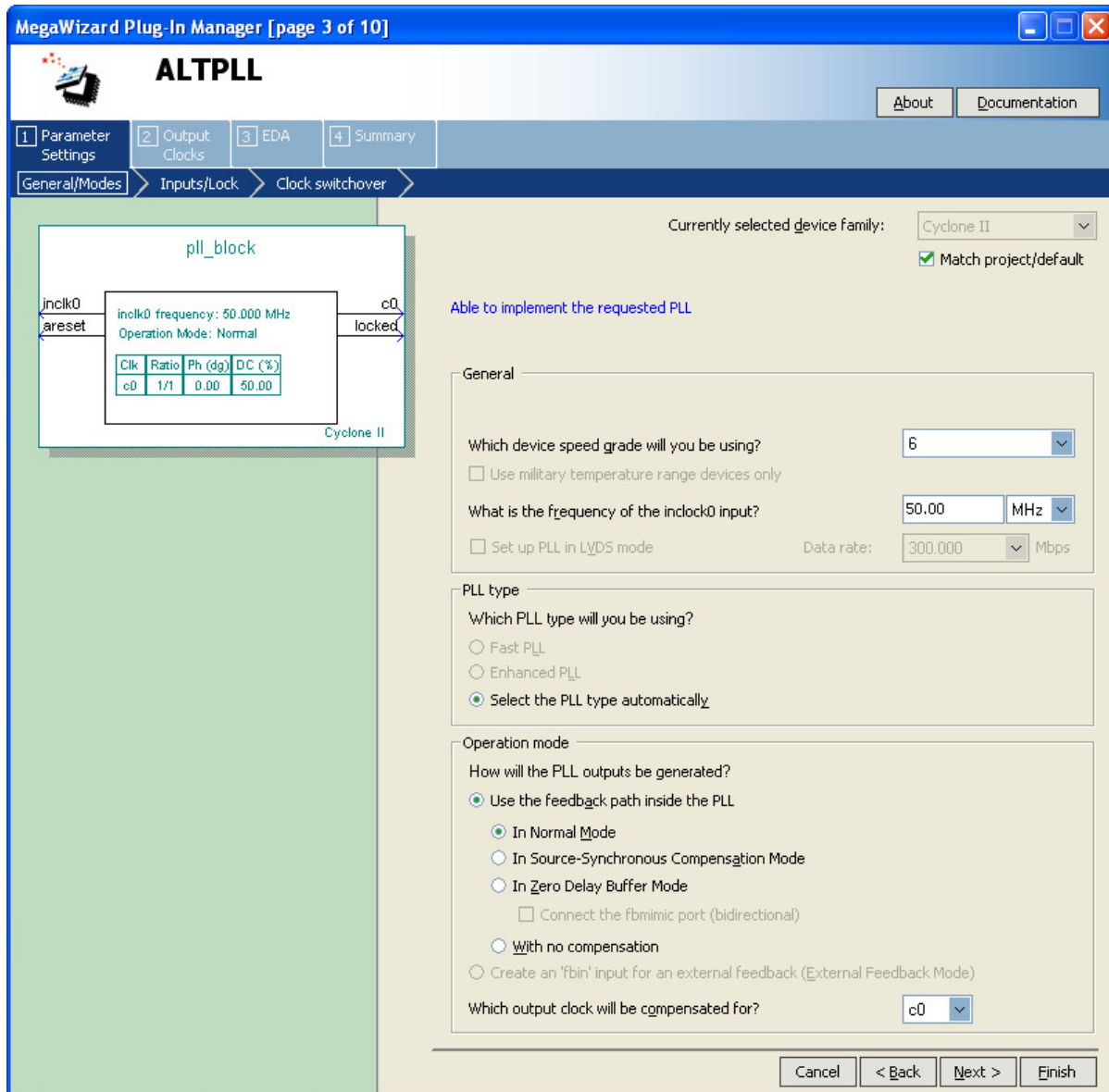


Figure 24. MegaWizard Plug-In Manager, Page 3

On page 4, deselect **Create an 'areset' input to asynchronously reset the PLL**, and also deselect **Create 'locked' output**. Click **Next**. Refer to Figure 25.

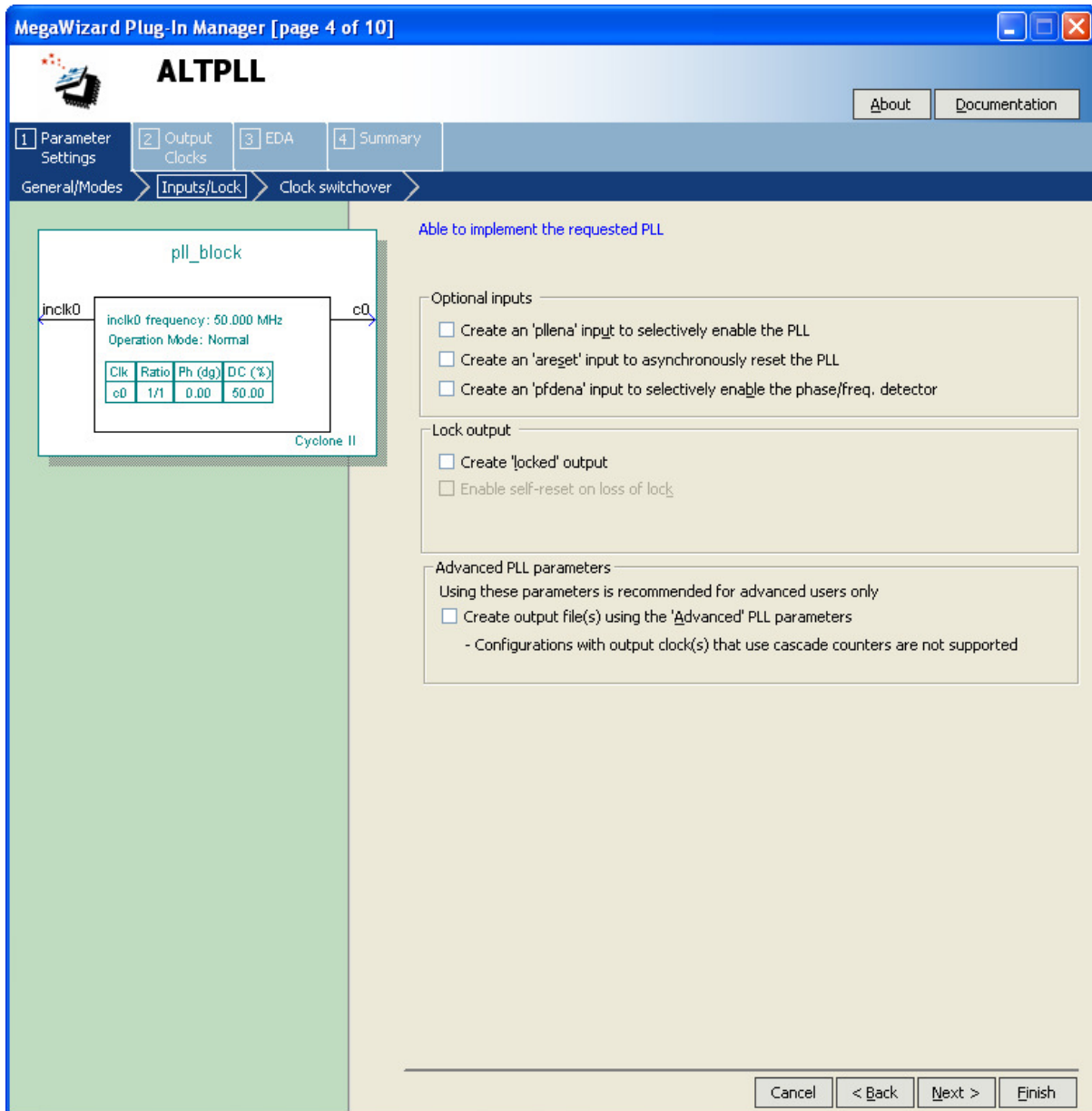


Figure 25. MegaWizard Plug-In Manager, Page 4

Click **Next** on page 5. On page 6, select **Enter output clock parameters:** and verify that **100 MHz** is in the **Requested settings**. Click **Next**. Refer to Figure 26.

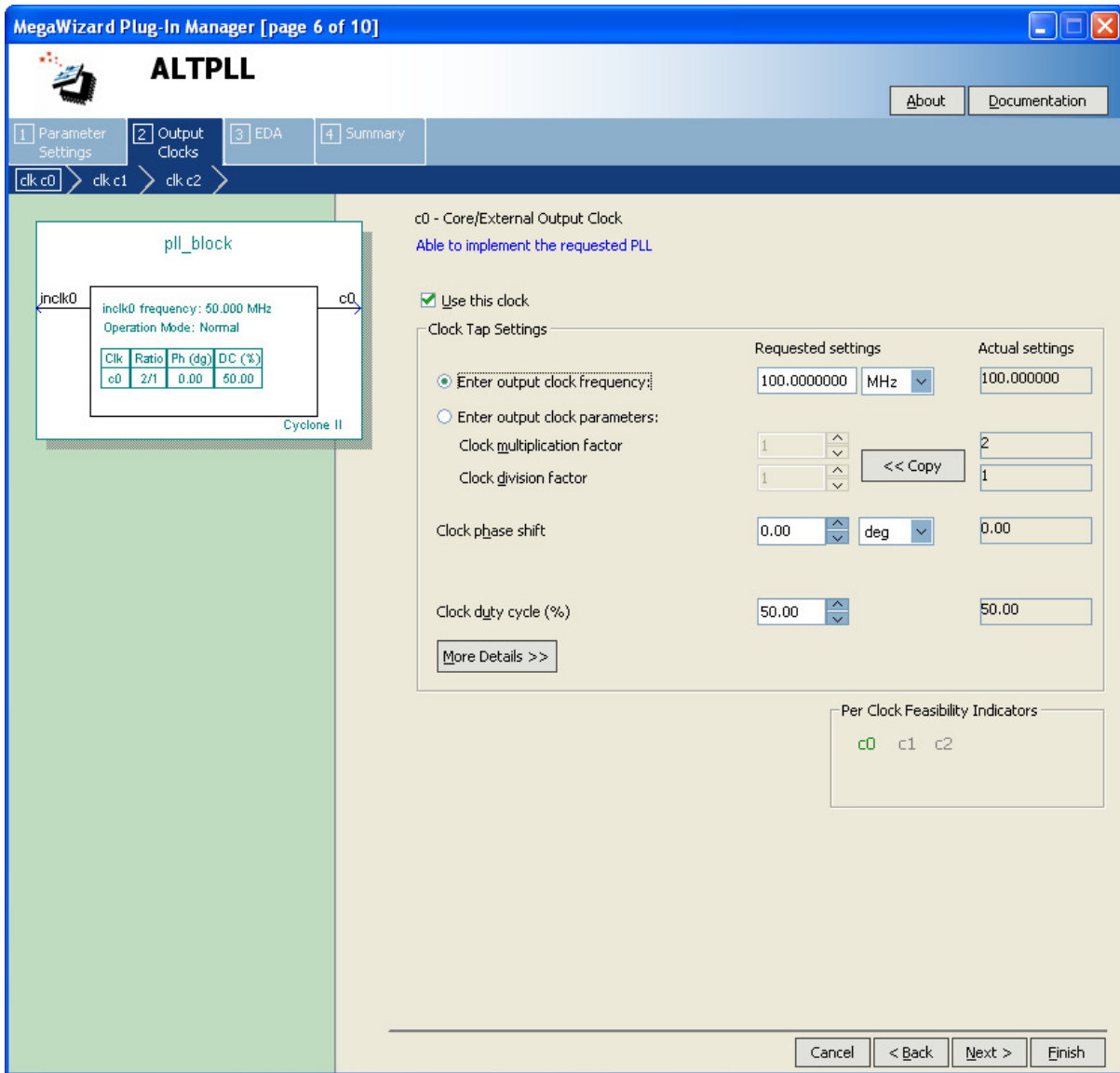


Figure 26. MegaWizard Plug-In Manager, Page 6

On page 7, check **Use this clock**. On the **Clock phase shift** option, change the **Requested settings** to **-3.00ns**. The **deg** might need to be changed to **ns** before selecting -3.00. Verify that the value is negative. Click **Next**. Refer to Figure 27.

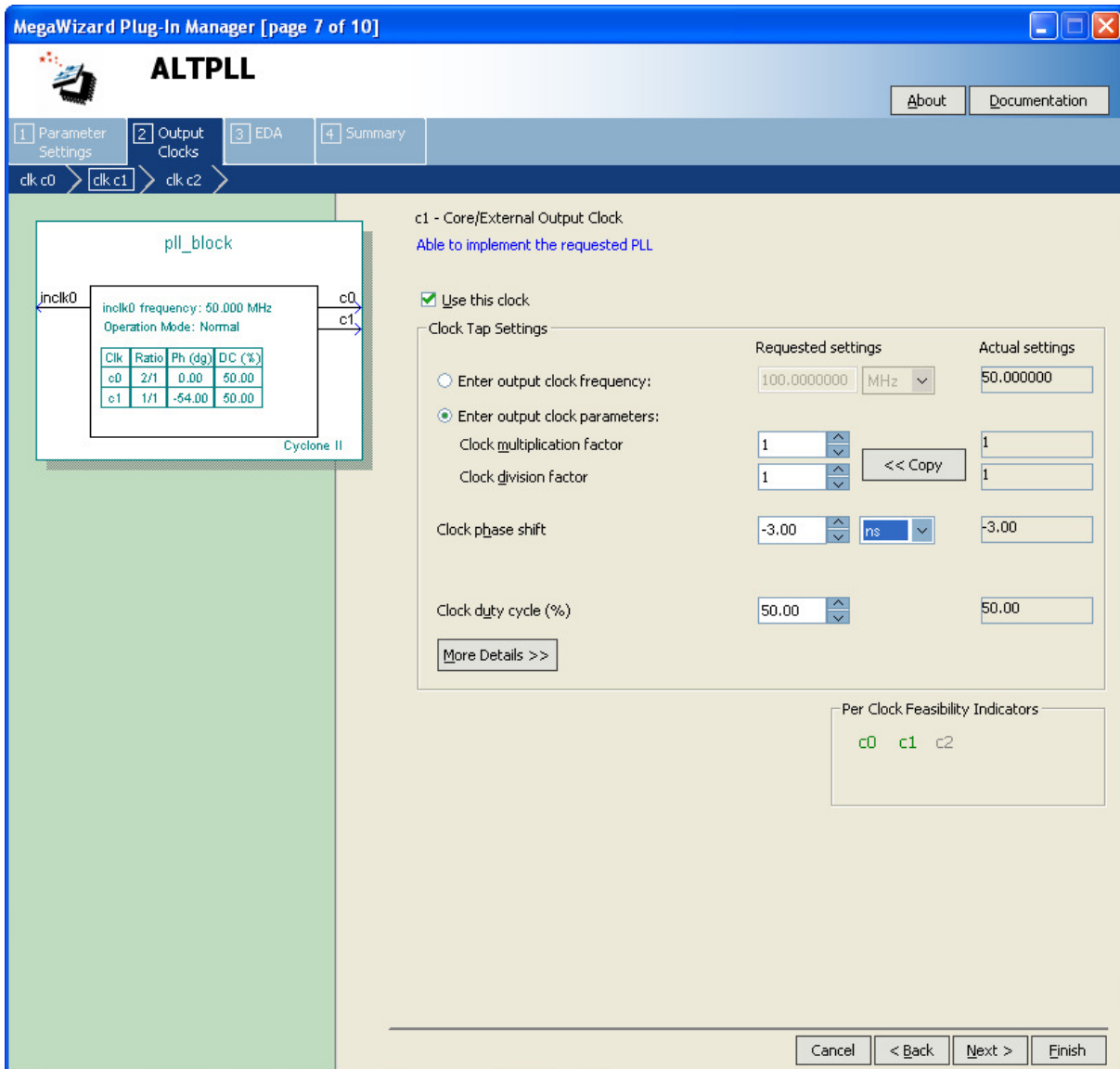


Figure 27. MegaWizard Plug-In Manager, Page 7

Click **Next** on pages 8 and 9, and click **Finish** on page 10. The **Symbol** window opens again. Click **OK**, and place the newly created **pll_block** to the left of the **NiosII_Processor** block. Refer to Figure 28.

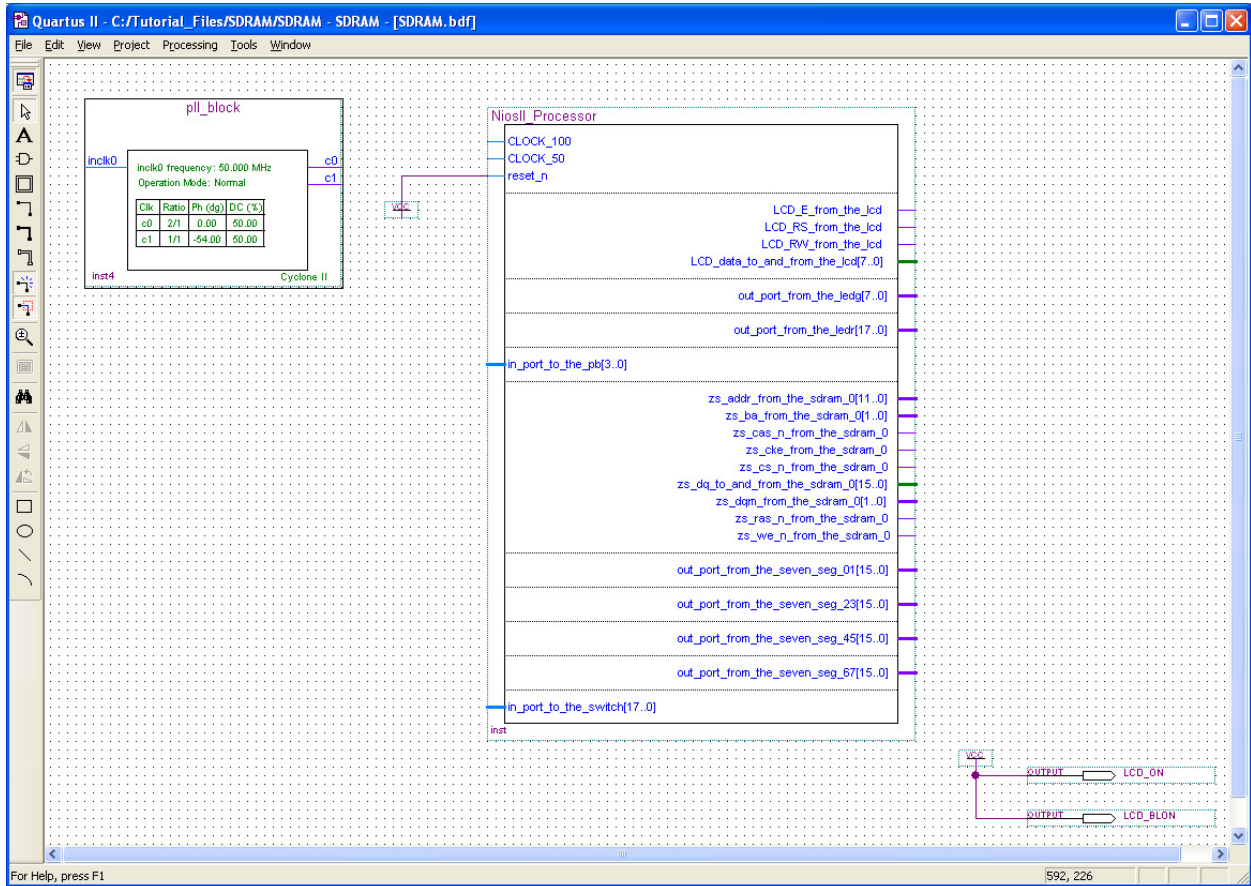


Figure 28. PLL Block Placement

Right-click somewhere in the block diagram, and click **Insert > Symbol...** Expand the **c:/altera/.../libraries** folder, expand **primitives**, expand **pin**, select **input**, and click **OK**.

Click to place this pin to the left of the **inclk0** terminal on the **pll_block**. Double-click the newly created input pin to open the **Pin Properties** window. In the **Pin name(s):** section, rename the pin to **CLOCK_50**, and click **OK**.

Right-click somewhere in the block diagram, and click **Insert > Symbol...** Expand the **c:/altera/.../libraries** folder, expand **primitives**, expand **pin**, select **output** and click **OK**.

Click to place this pin to the left of the **CLOCK_50** terminal on the **NiosII Processor**. Double-click the newly created output pin to open the **Pin Properties** window. In the **Pin name(s):** section, rename the pin to **SDRAM_CLK**, and click **OK**.

Move the mouse to the blue **inclk0** line on the **pll_block**. The mouse cursor should change into a cross-hair shape. Click and hold to draw a line connecting **inclk0** to the **CLOCK_50**. Let go of the mouse when a small box shape appears on **CLOCK_50**. If a small "X" appears, it is not connected properly.

Following the same procedure, connect **c1** on the **pll_block** to **CLOCK_50** on the **NiosII Processor** block, connect **c0** and **Clock_100**, and connect **SDRAM_CLK** to the line between **CLOCK_50** and **c1**. Refer to Figure 29.

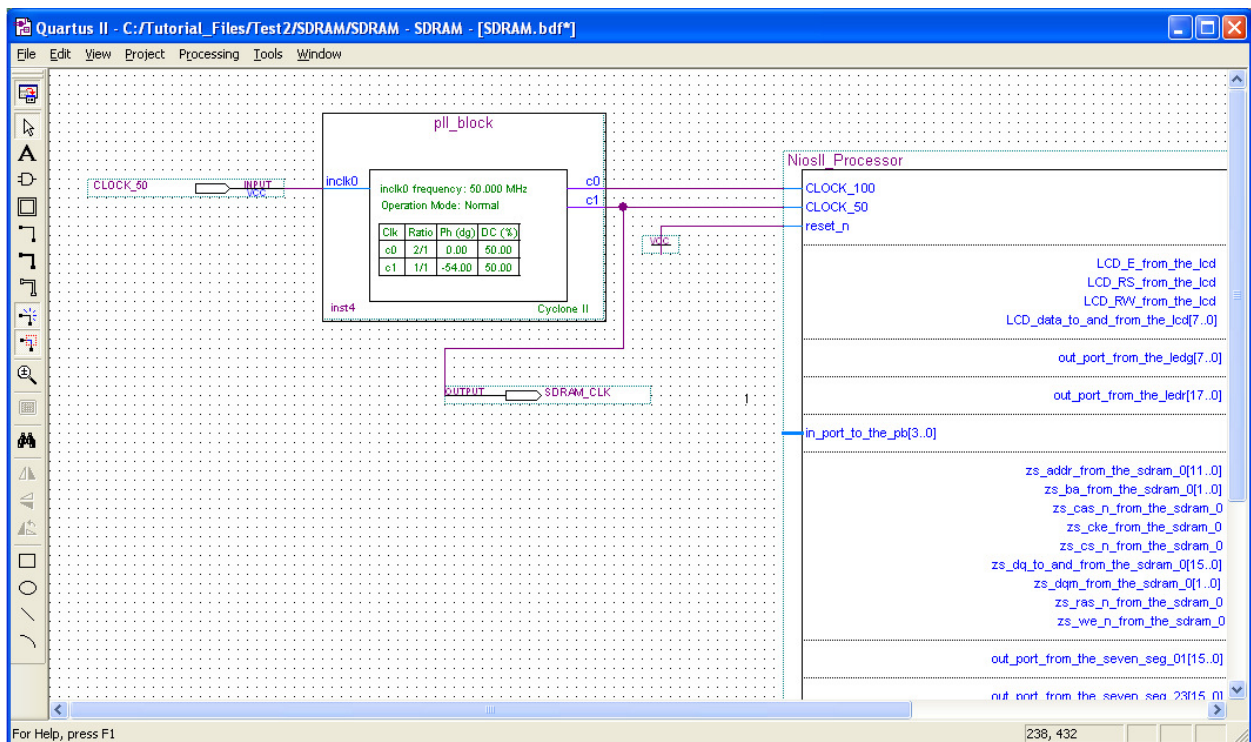


Figure 29. pll_block Connections

Pin Generation

Right-click on the **NiosII_Processor** block, and click **Generate Pins for Symbol Ports**. Input and output pins are automatically generated for the rest of the Nios II system. Verify that the newly generated pins do not cover the **vcc** placed earlier. Move **vcc** to a different location if it is covered. Refer to Figure 30 for the completed block diagram.

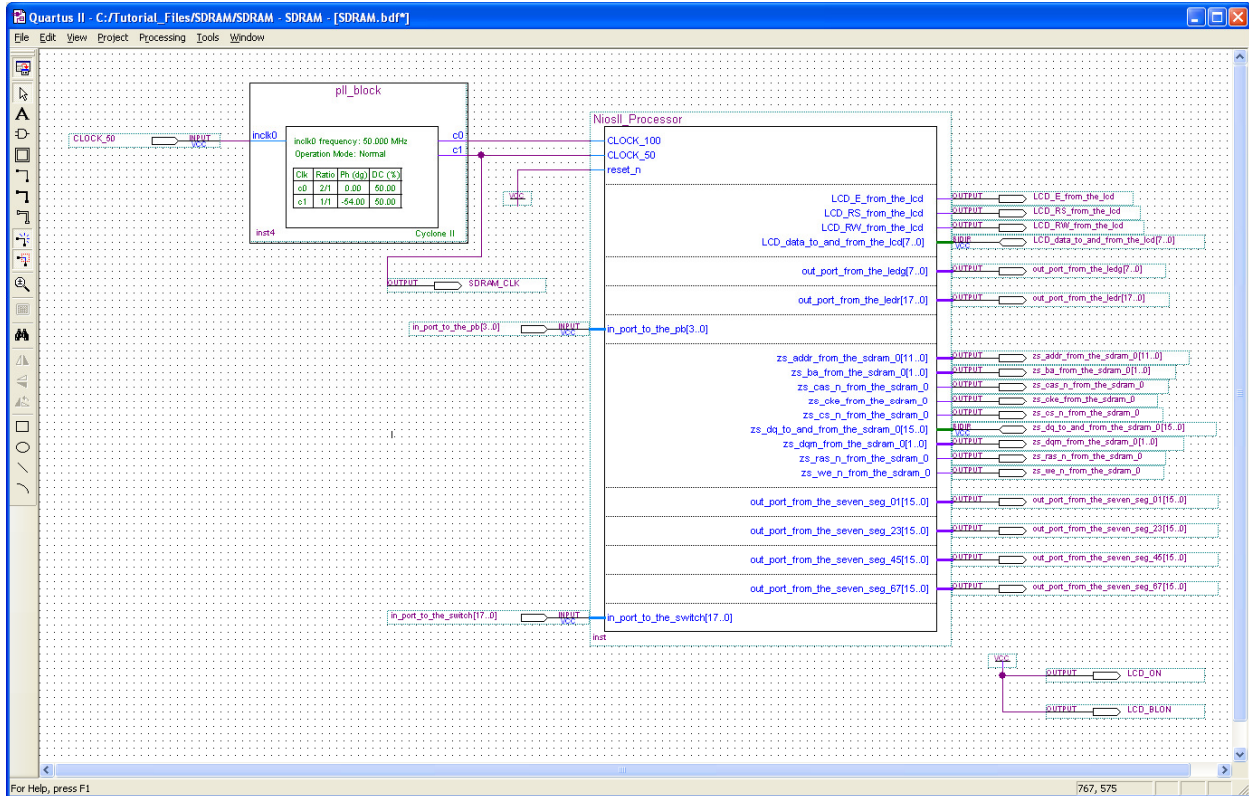


Figure 30. Complete Quartus II System

Analysis and Elaboration

The next step is Analysis and Elaboration. Under the **Processing** menu, select **Start > Start Analysis & Elaboration**. Choose to save changes if prompted. Upon completion of the process, a message window appears. Ignore the warnings and click **OK**.

Pin Assignments

Make the pin assignments for the devices. Under the **Assignments** menu, select **Import Assignments...** Click the ... box to the right of the **File name:** section, and browse for the **Pin_Assignments.csv** file that accompanies this tutorial. Select **Open** and click **OK**.

Verify that the pins are named correctly. Under the **Assignments** menu, select **Pins**. In the **Filter:** menu, choose **Pins: unassigned**. Only 8 pins should appear in the list: pins [7] and [15] from each of the pin groups **out_port_from_the_seven_seg_XX** (where **XX** is 01, 23, 45, 67). If there are more than eight pins listed, check the SOPC builder section of this tutorial again to ensure that all of the devices are named exactly as specified in this tutorial. Close the **Pins** window.

Compilation

Compile the design. Under **Processing**, select **Start Compilation**. The success message in Figure 31 appear upon completion. Ignore the warnings that are listed, and click **OK**.

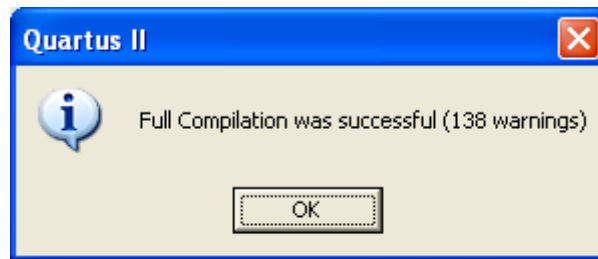


Figure 31. Successful Compilation Window

System Programmer

Plug the power supply and USB-Blaster cable into the DE2 board. Hit the red power button to turn on the DE2 board. Under the **Tools** menu, select **Programmer**. If a pop-up window appears, click **OK**. In the **Programmer** window, choose **Hardware Setup...** Verify that the **USB-Blaster[USB-0]** is selected, and click **Close**. Verify that the **Mode:** selected is **JTAG**. Set switch SW19 on the DE2 board (next to the LCD) to **Run**. Click **Start** in the programmer window. Refer to Figure 32 for the programmer setup.

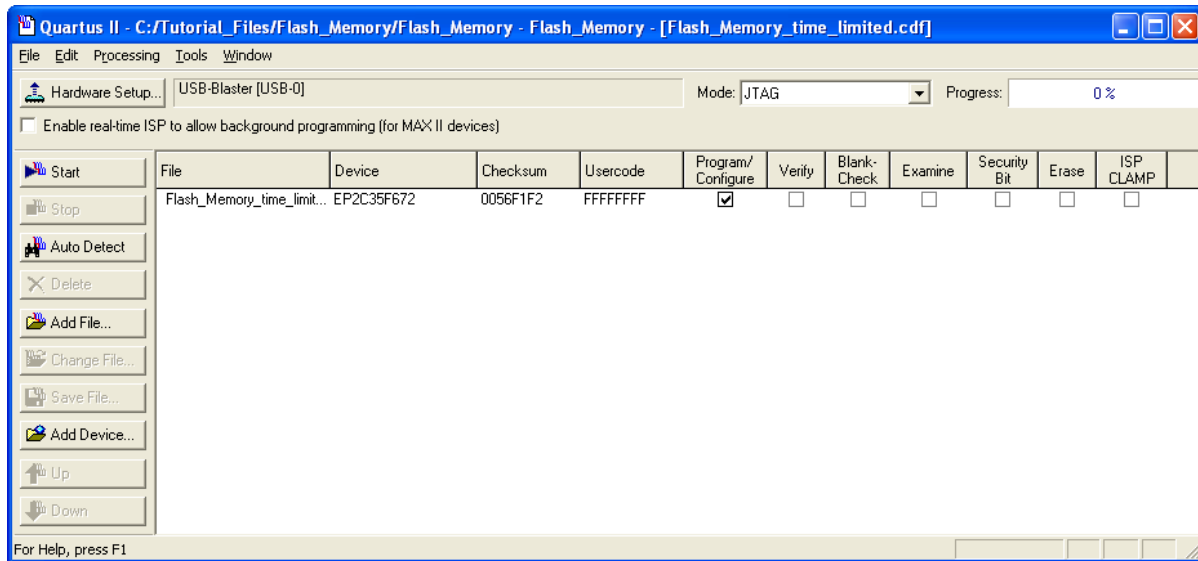


Figure 32. Programmer Window

The window shown in Figure 33 opens. This window confirms that the FPGA on the DE2 board successfully configured.

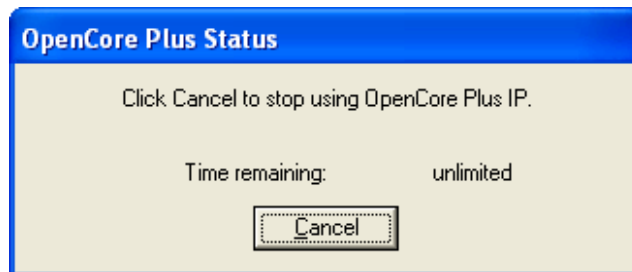


Figure 33. Successful Connection Window

Software Design in the Nios II IDE

Creating a New C/C++ Application

Next, implement a software application for the Nios II system. Open the Nios II IDE. Under the **File** menu, select **New > Nios II C/C++ Application** to open the **New Project** window. In the **Name:** section, type **Tutorial_SDRAM**. In the **SOPC Builder System PTF File**, browse to the location where the **NiosII_Processor** was saved (when created with SOPC builder), and open it. Under **Select Project Template**, select **Blank Project**. Click **Finish**. Refer to Figure 34.

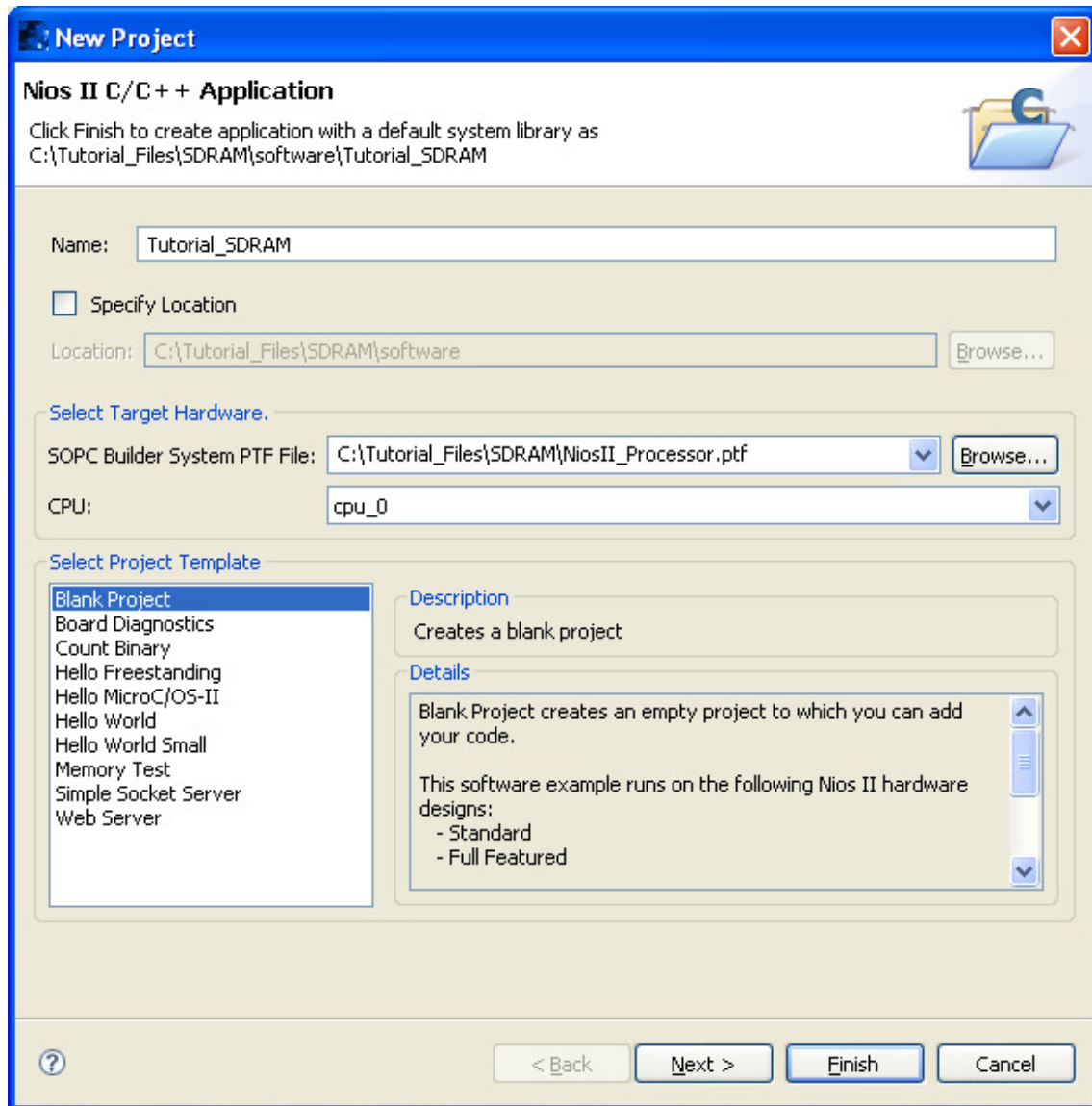


Figure 34. New C/C++ Application Window

Importing Source and Header Files

Select the **Tutorial_SDRAM** folder in the **Nios II C/C++ Projects** pane. In the **File** menu, select **Import...** In the **Import** window, select **File System** as shown in Figure 35, and click **Next**. **Browse** to the folder containing the example files accompanying this tutorial. Check **SDRAM.c** and **header.h** as shown in Figure 36, and click **Finish**. SDRAM.c and header.h should now appear in the Tutorial_SDRAM folder in the Nios II IDE.

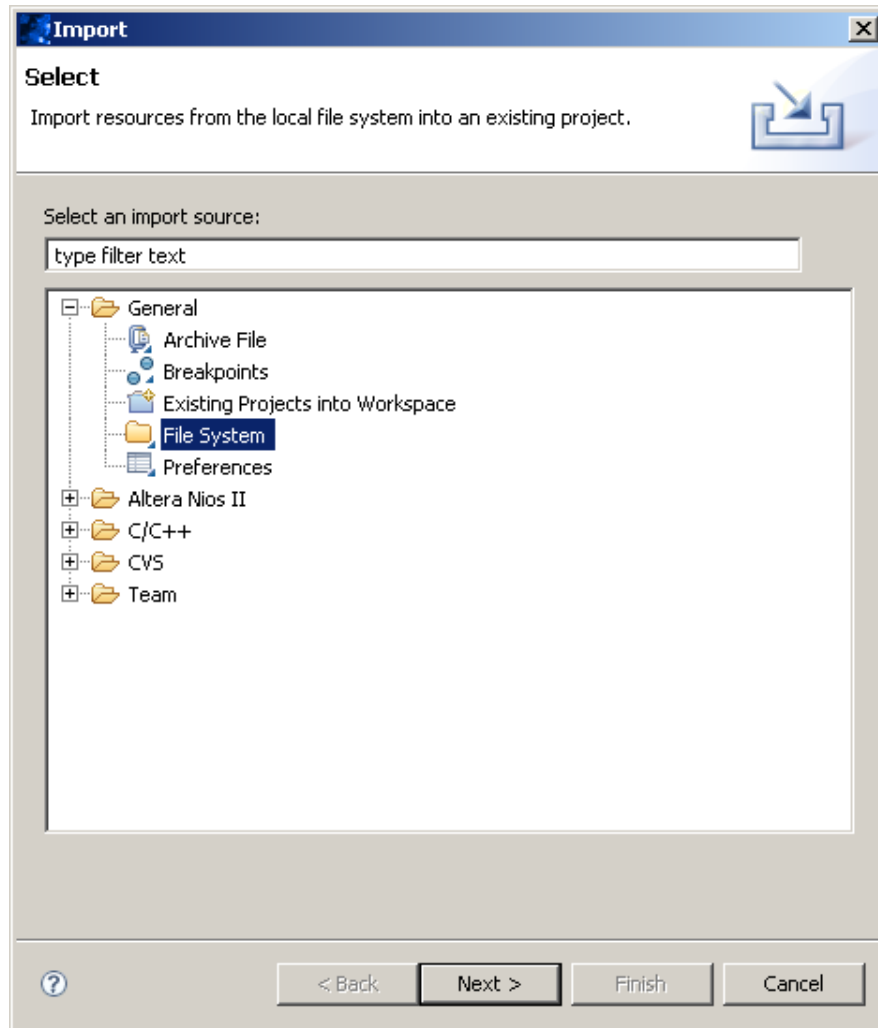


Figure 35. Import File System

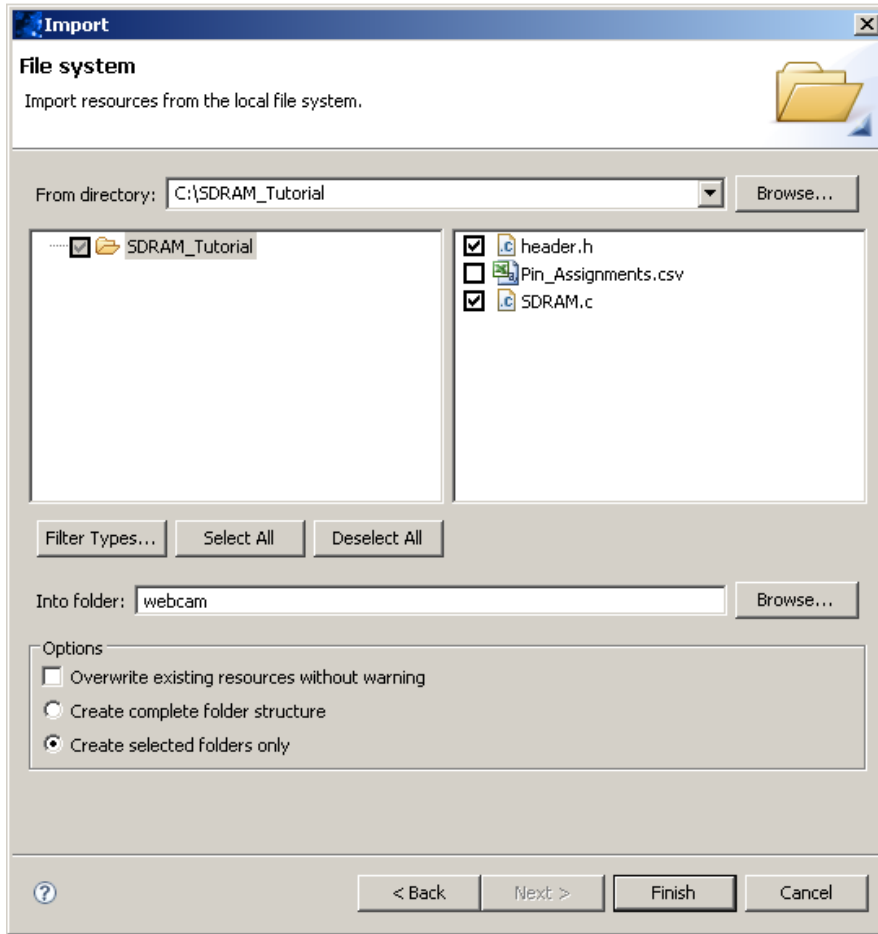


Figure 36. Import Files

System Library Configuration

Before the program can be run, it is necessary to adjust the system library properties. Right-click on the **Tutorial_SDRAM** folder, and select **System Library Properties**. A new window opens. Select **sdram_0** in the **Program memory (.text):** drop-down menu. Also select **sdram_0** for the **Read-only data memory (.rodata):** drop-down menu. Do not change any of the other default settings. Click **OK**. Refer to Figure 37.

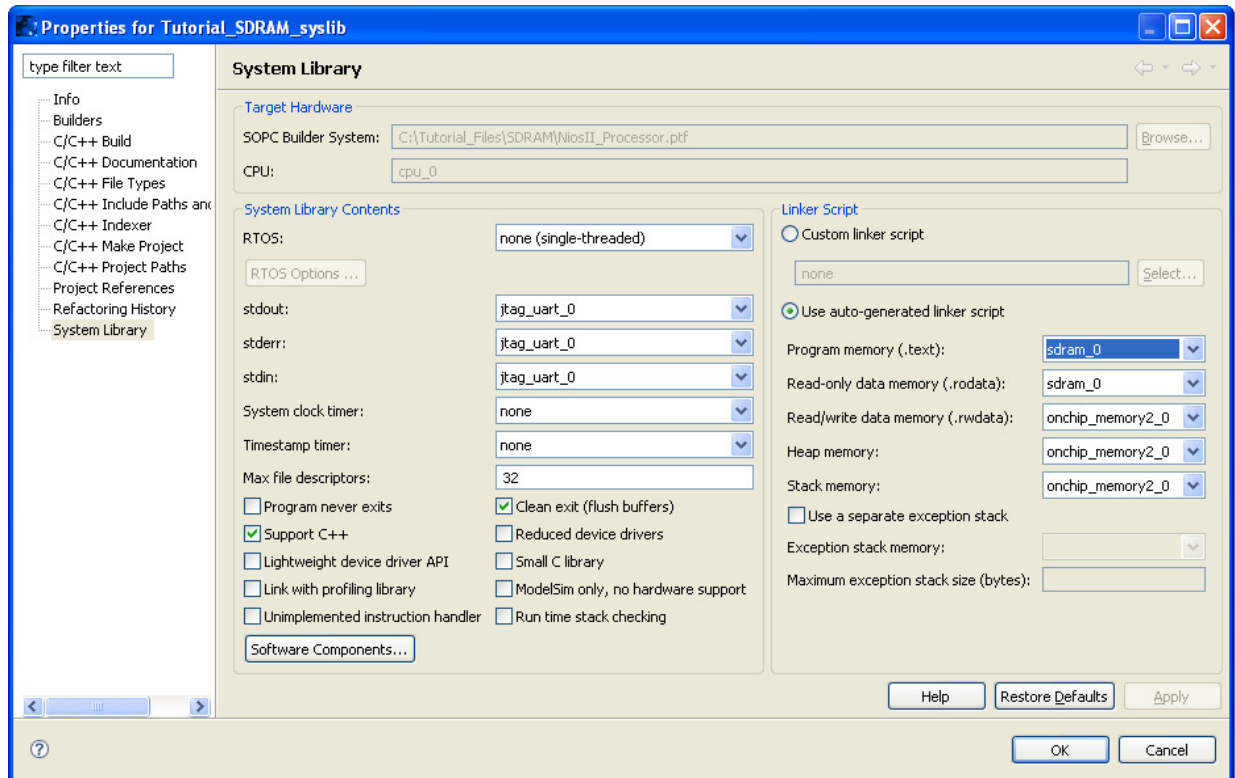


Figure 37. System Library Properties

Running the Software

Finally, run the program. Right-click on the **Tutorial_SDRAM** folder, and select **Run As > Nios II Hardware**. If prompted to save changes, click **Yes**. It may take some time for the program to build, but, upon successful completion, a message similar to the following displays in the **Console** tab:

```
nios2-terminal: connected to hardware target using JTAG UART on cable
nios2-terminal: "USB-Blaster [USB-0]", device 1, instance 0
nios2-terminal: (Use the IDE stop button or Ctrl-C to terminate)
```

The DE2 board should be running the program. If the sample code was used, the LCD should display:

```
You Are AWESOME!
LCD Works ###
```

The seven-segment displays count in hexadecimal, and the green LEDs count in binary. If a switch is switched to the up position, the red LED above the switch turns on. If the pushbutton KEY0 is pressed, all of the devices count down instead of up. If KEY1 is pressed, the devices resume counting up. Each time KEY2 is pressed, the devices count incrementally faster. Likewise, each time KEY3 is pressed, the devices count incrementally slower.

If any changes are made to the code, right-click on **Tutorial_SDRAM**, and select **Run As > Nios II Hardware** to run the new code.

Conclusion

This application note explains how to set up a Nios II system that uses the SDRAM on Terasic Technologies, Inc.'s DE2 board. The LCD controller, pushbuttons, seven-segment displays, switches, and red and green LEDs on the DE2 board are also used.

Additional Information

Getting Started with Altera's DE2 Board. Altera Corporation. 2008.
DE2 User Manual. Altera Corporation. 2005.
Nios II Processor Reference Handbook. Altera Corporation. 2009.
Nios II Software Developer's Handbook. Altera Corporation. 2009.
Quartus II Handbook, Volume 5: Embedded Peripherals. Altera Corporation. 2009.

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