

Nexys 4 DDR External Memory

Acknowledgement

This tutorial is derived from a tutorial from Digilent Inc.

Goal

- Use IP integrator to connect and configure the external memory controller
- Be able to use a C program in SDK to interact with the external memory
- Use some software debugging tools in an embedded processor environment.

Requirements

- Xilinx Vivado software
- Xilinx SDK software
- Xilinx Nexys 4 DDR board and a programming cable
- Nexys 4 Board Files
- Enough disk space for the project files

Background

The external memory on the The Nexys4 DDR board is available in two forms: volatile DRAM and non-volatile flash. This tutorial will focus on using the faster DRAM module as an AXI peripheral.

Since the DRAM is external to the FPGA, logic must be created to communicate with the memory in the form of a **memory controller**. This memory controller generates a clock for the RAM as well as manages the transfer of data on both edges of the clock for double data-rate operation. In addition, it presents a simple interface for the rest of the system to access the memory.

The Micron MT47H64M16HR-25 DDR2 module on the Nexys 4 DDR is a 1 Gb (gigabit) or 128 MiB (megabyte) memory with 16-bit wide data bus. This provides much more memory capacity than is available on the FPGA itself, but the bandwidth is somewhat limited since all data must pass through the 16 data pins connecting the two devices.

1. Import the Board Package

The Xilinx memory interface generator is highly configurable and requires detailed information about the memory to function correctly. To simplify this process, the settings have been packaged in a board file by Digilent.

1. Unzip the board_repository.zip file

2. Invoke the Vivado IDE

3. bring up the **Tcl Console** at the bottom of the window and enter:

```
set_param project.boardPartRepoPaths <path-to-board-repository>
```

replacing <path-to-board-repository> with the location of the unzipped files

2. Create a Project


1. Create a **New Project**

2. At the **Default Part** dialog, specify **Boards** and select the **Nexys 4 DDR** board

3. **Finish** creating the project

Default Part

Choose a default Xilinx part or board for your project. This can be changed later.



Specify **Filter**

Parts **Boards**

Vendor: All
Display Name: All
Board Rev: Latest

Reset All Filters

Search:

Display Name	Vendor	Board Rev
Nexys4 DDR	digilentinc.com	1.1
MicroZed Board	em.avnet.com	e
ZedBoard Zynq Evaluation and Development Kit	em.avnet.com	d
Artix-7 AC701 Evaluation Platform	xilinx.com	1.0

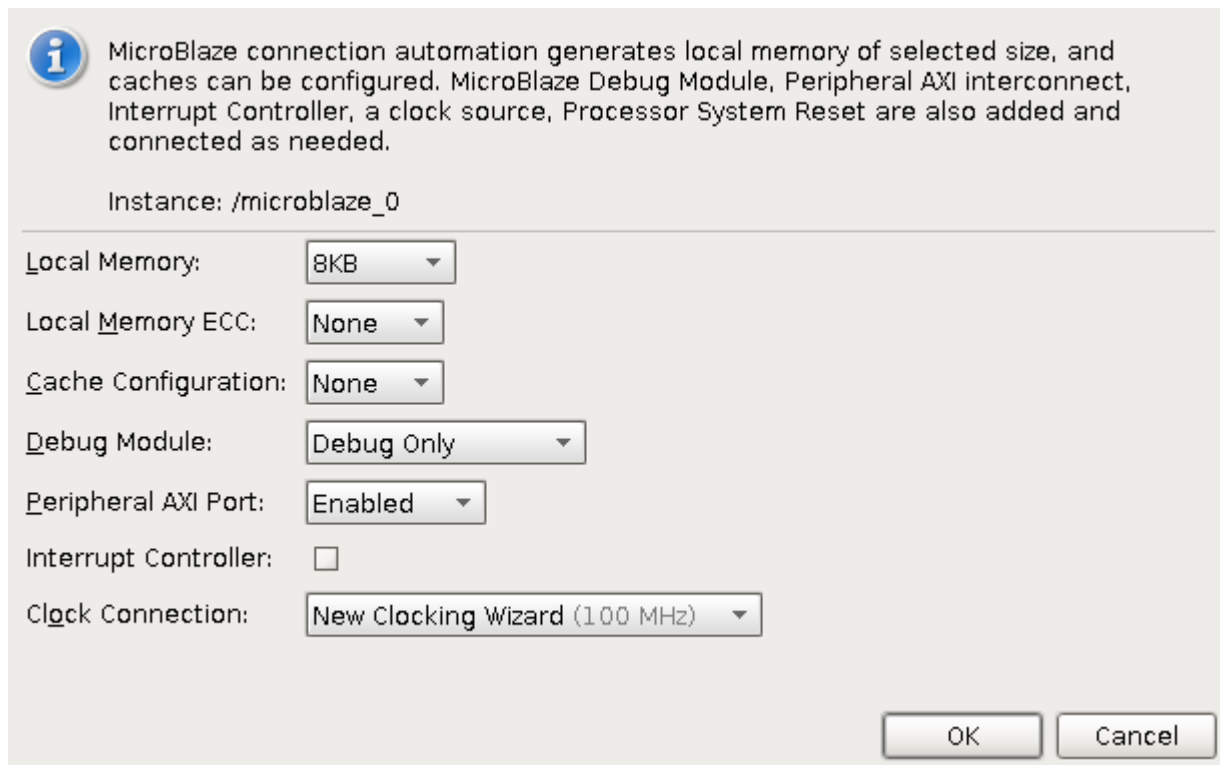
< Back Next > Finish Cancel

3. Create an IP Integrator Design

1. From Navigator > IP Integrator, select **Create Block Design**

Basic MicroBlaze System

1. Right click anywhere in the Diagram and select **Add IP** and add a MicroBlaze block to the design
2. **Run Block Automation** for the microblaze and use the default settings and press OK



The dialog box titled "MicroBlaze connection automation" provides configuration options for a MicroBlaze instance. It includes an information icon and a text description of the automation process. Below the description, the instance name is set to "/microblaze_0". The configuration options are as follows:

Configuration Option	Value
Local Memory:	8KB
Local Memory ECC:	None
Cache Configuration:	None
Debug Module:	Debug Only
Peripheral AXI Port:	Enabled
Interrupt Controller:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clock Connection:	New Clocking Wizard (100 MHz)

At the bottom right, there are "OK" and "Cancel" buttons.

Clock Customization

The processing system will operate at 100 MHz, but the memory controller requires a 200 MHz input clock to generate the appropriate clock for the external DRAM. We will create this next.

1. Double click the Clock Wizard (clk_wiz_1) block to recustomize it
2. Under the **Board** tab, select **Generate Board based IO Constraints**
3. Use the **Board Interface** pull-down menu for IP Interface **CLK_IN1** and select **sys clock**

Component Name

Board Clocking Options Output Clocks MMCM Settings Port Rena ◀ ▶ 📄

☒ Generate Board based IO Constraints

[Associate IP interface with DIGILENTINC.COM:NEXYS4 DDR:PART0:1.1 Board in...](#)

IP Interface	Board Interface
CLK_IN1	sys clock ▼
CLK_IN2	Custom ▼
EXT_RESET_IN	Custom ▼

4. Select the **Output Clocks** tab
5. Check the radio box for Output Clock **clock_out2** and enter a requested clock frequency of **200**
6. While in the Output Clocks tab, change the **Reset Type** to **Active Low**

Component Name

Board Clocking Options **Output Clocks** MMCM Settings Port Renaming Summary

The phase is calculated relative to the active input clock.

Output Clock	Output Freq (MHz)		Phase (degrees)		A
	Requested	Actual	Requested		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> clk_out1	100.000	100.000	0.000		0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> clk_out2	200.000	200.000	0.000		0
<input type="checkbox"/> clk_out3	100.000	N/A	0.000		N
<input type="checkbox"/> clk_out4	100.000	N/A	0.000		N
<input type="checkbox"/> clk_out5	100.000	N/A	0.000		N
<input type="checkbox"/> clk_out6	100.000	N/A	0.000		N
<input type="checkbox"/> clk_out7	100.000	N/A	0.000		N

☐ USE CLOCK SEQUENCING

Output Clock	Sequence Number
clk_out1	1
clk_out2	1
clk_out3	1
clk_out4	1
clk_out5	1
clk_out6	1
clk_out7	1

Clocking Feedback

Source

☒ Automatic Control On-Chip
☐ Automatic Control Off-Chip
☐ User-Controlled On-Chip
☐ User-Controlled Off-Chip

Enable Optional Inputs / Outputs

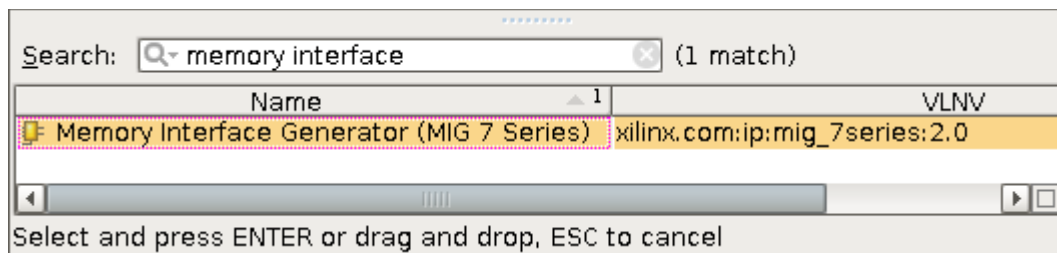
☒ reset ☐ power_down ☐ input_clk_stopped
☒ locked ☐ clkfbstopped

Reset Type

☐ Active High
☒ Active Low

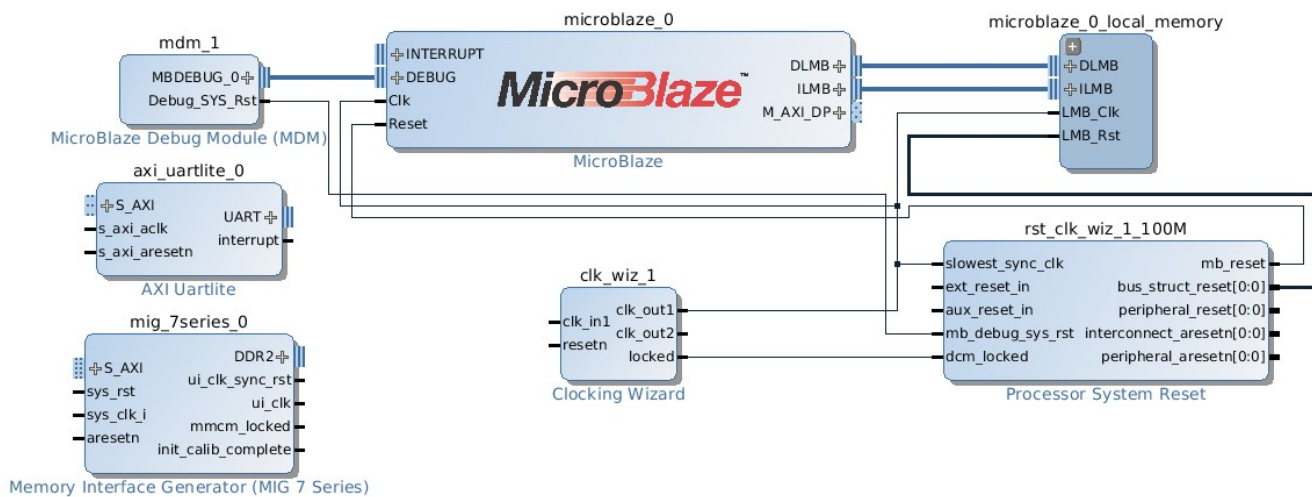
UART and Memory Controller

1. Right click anywhere in the Diagram and select **Add IP** and add an **AXI Uartlite** block to the design
2. Repeat the process to search for and add a **Memory Interface Generator (MIG)** peripheral



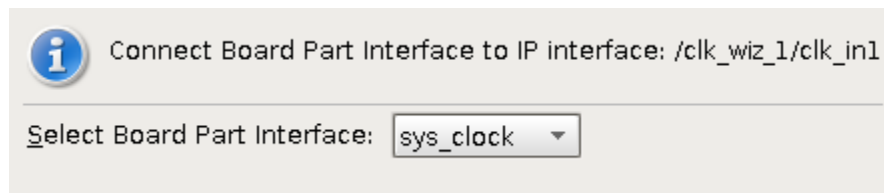
3. **Run Block Automation** for the memory controller (/mig_7series_0) component. This configures the block for the DRAM on the Nexys 4 DDR board. Error [BD 41-1273] may appear during automation, but can be safely ignored.

At this point you should have a design similar to:



Making Connections

1. **Run Connection Automation** for clk_wiz_1/clk_in1 and choose **sys_clock**

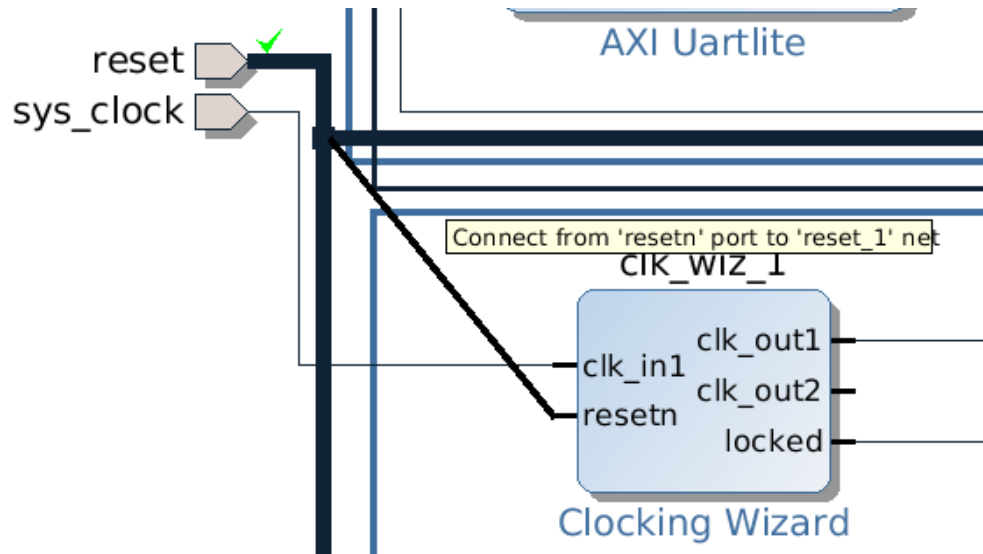


2. **Run Connection Automation** for /rst_clk_wiz_1_100M/ext_reset_in and choose **reset**

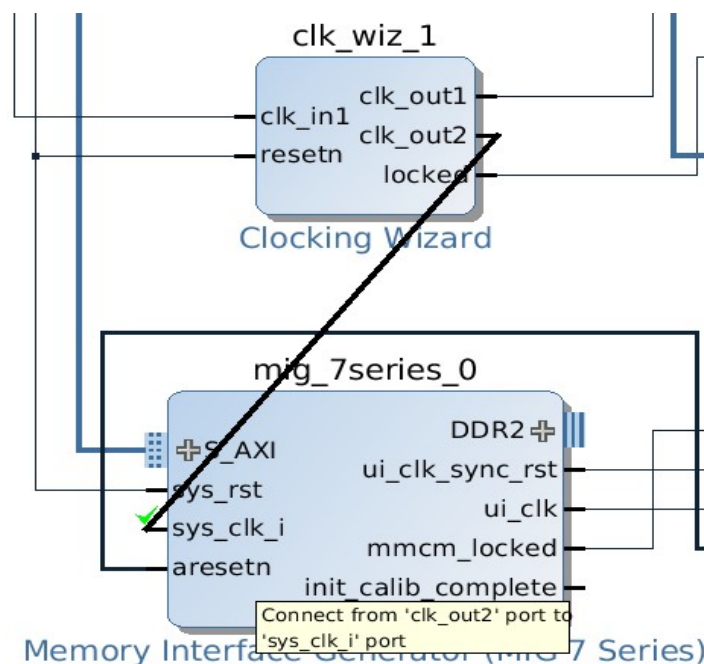
3. **Run Connection Automation** for /axi_uartlite_0/S_AXI and leave the Clock Connection to **auto**

4. **Run Connection Automation** for /axi_uartlite_0/UART and select **USB_Uart**

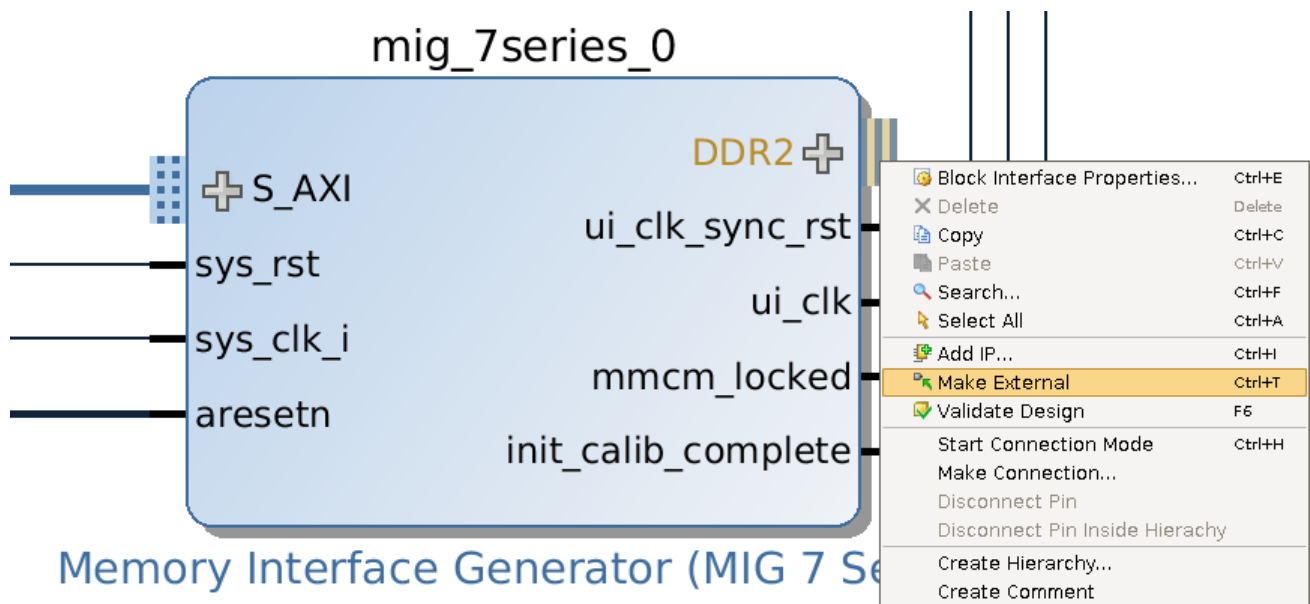
5. **Run Connection Automation** for /mig_7series_0/S_AXI and leave the Clock Connection to **auto**
6. **Run Connection Automation** for /mig_7series_0/reset and select **reset**
7. Connect the resetn of the clock wizard to the **reset** on the diagram



8. Connect the **clk_out2** of the clock wizard to the **sys_clk_i** of the memory interface generator



9. Select the **DDR2** bus on the memory controller, right click and select **Make External**. To propagate these signals to the pins of the FPGA.

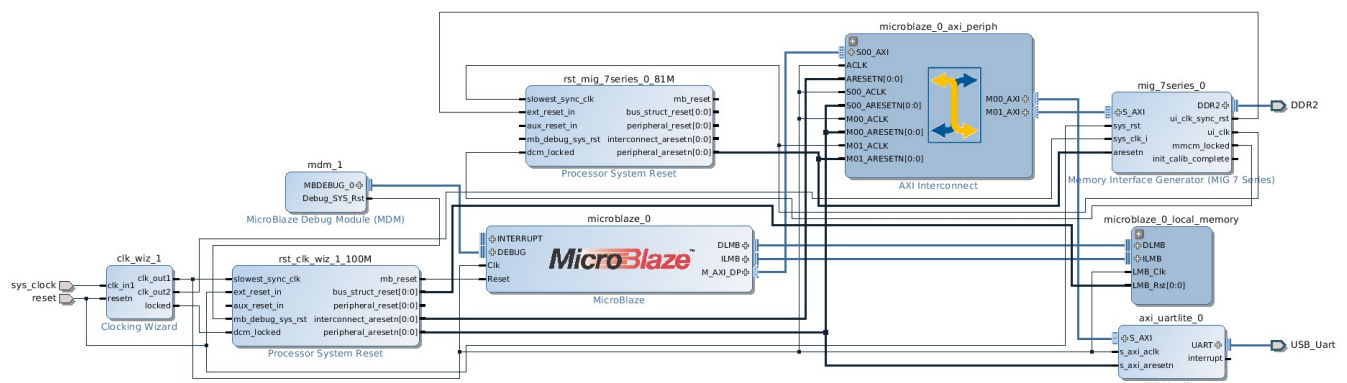


Build the bitstream

1. Click on  to validate your design

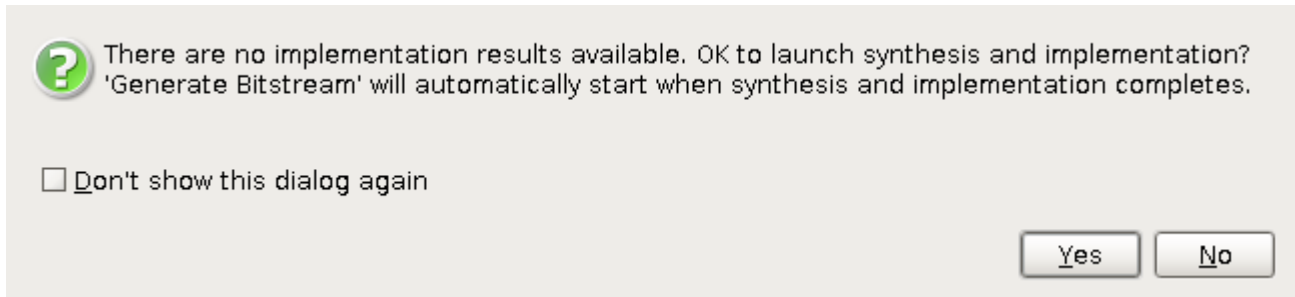


Your design show resemble the following:



2. In the **Sources** box, click **IP Sources**. Right click your design and choose **Create HDL Wrapper**. Let Vivado manager the wrapper and auto-update
3. Click on **Generate Bitstream**. If you haven't save the project yet, a dialog will

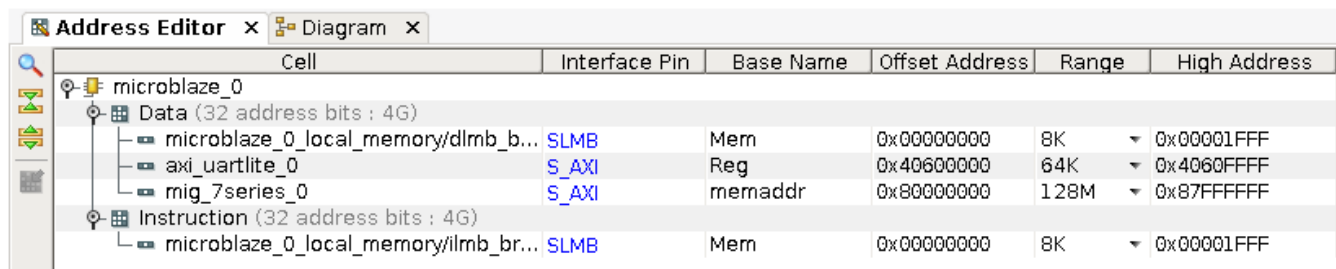
appear prompting you to save. A second dialog will appear stating that no implementation results are available, click Yes to run through synthesis, implementation and bitstream generation



Note: Warnings during implementation about the pin constraints may be safely ignored.

4. Test the Memory

The connection automation steps mapped the AXI peripherals on to the address space of the MicroBlaze processor. This can be viewed in the **Address Editor** tab of IP Integrator

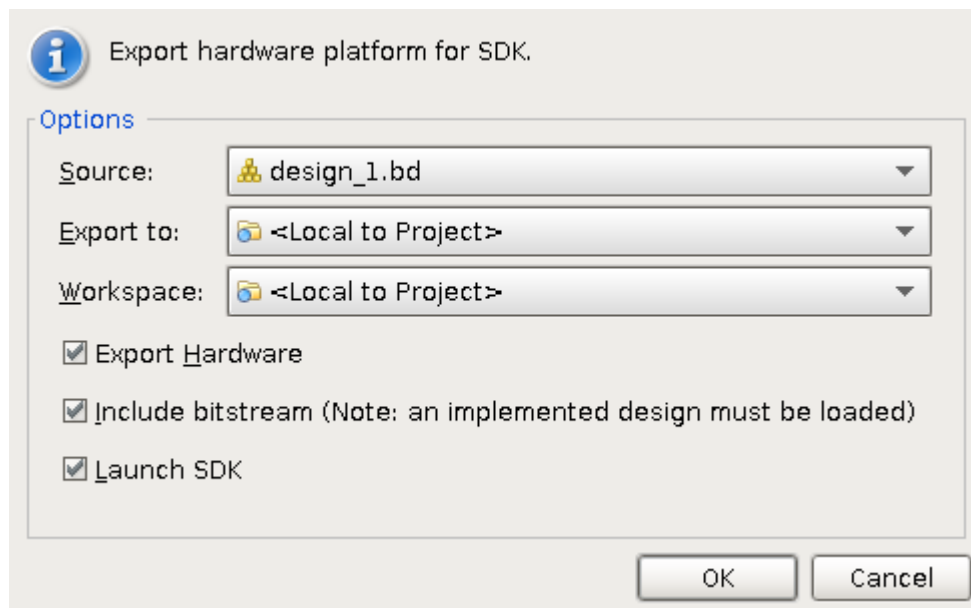


Cell	Interface Pin	Base Name	Offset Address	Range	High Address
microblaze_0					
Data (32 address bits : 4G)					
microblaze_0_local_memory/dlmb_b...	SLMB	Mem	0x00000000	8K	0x00001FFF
axi_uartlite_0	S_AXI	Reg	0x40600000	64K	0x4060FFFF
mig_7series_0	S_AXI	memaddr	0x80000000	128M	0x87FFFFFF
Instruction (32 address bits : 4G)					
microblaze_0_local_memory/ilmb_br...	SLMB	Mem	0x00000000	8K	0x00001FFF

Note that the external memory is mapped with a range of 128 MB at starting address 0x80000000 in this example. Also notice that the external memory is accessible from the **Data** port but not Instruction. In this design we chose to have the AXI data port (M_AXI_DP) connected as the master to the memory. Thus we cannot use the external RAM to store instructions. To use the DDR for instructions, **Enable Peripheral AXI Instruction Interface** should be selected and the M_AXI_IP port should be connected to the memory slave. This example will use the external RAM only for data storage.

Export the Design to SDK

1. Once the bitstream is generated, open the implemented design
2. Select File > Export > Export Hardware for SDK
3. Export the hardware and Launch SDK



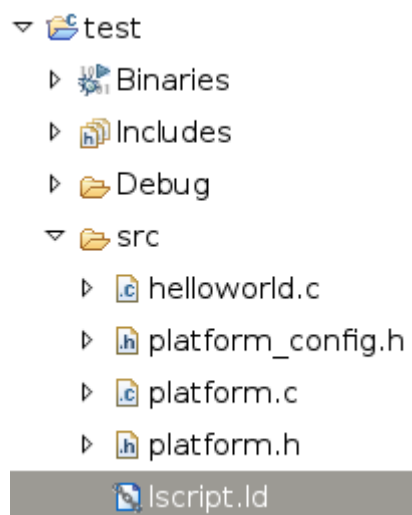
4. In SDK, Create a **New Application Project** and give it a name

5. Select **Hello World** as the Template and Finish the wizard

Creating a Test Program

In this test we will be using the Block RAM (BRAM) on the FPGA to run the program on the MicroBlaze. This is the **microblaze_0_local_memory** in the block design.

1. Open the **ldscript.ld** for your hello world program, in this example it is called "test"



The linker script describes where certain parts of the program should be mapped. At the top you should see two memory regions visible to the MicroBlaze,

the local BRAM and the external DDR:

Available Memory Regions

Name	Base Address	Size
microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntl	0x00000050	0x00001FB0
mig_7series_0	0x80000000	0x08000000

Since we want the program to run just on the local use the drop down boxes under **Section to Memory Region Mapping** to assign all Sections to the local memory:

Section to Memory Region Mapping

Section Name	Memory Region
.text	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.init	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.fini	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.ctors	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.dtors	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.rodata	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.sdata2	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.sbss2	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.data	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.got	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.got1	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.got2	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.eh_frame	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.jcr	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.gcc_except_table	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.sdata	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.sbss	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.tdata	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.tbss	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.bss	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.heap	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze
.stack	microblaze_0_local_memory_ilmb_bram_if_cntlr_microblaze

2. Change the helloworld.c program to the following:

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include "platform.h"
#include "xparameters.h"
// Read/Write 16384 words or 64kB
#define TEST_SIZE 16384

void print(char *str);

// Pointer to the external memory
volatile unsigned int * memptr = (unsigned int*) XPAR_MIG_7SERIES_0_BASEADDR;
// Thomas Wang's 32-bit mix hash
inline unsigned int hash(unsigned int key)
{
    key += ~(key << 15);
    key ^= (key >> 10);
    key += (key << 3);
    key ^= (key >> 6);
    key += ~(key << 11);
    key ^= (key >> 16);
    return key;
}
int main()
{
    init_platform();

    int i, errors;

    // Write TEST_SIZE words to memory
    print("BEGIN WRITE\n\r");
    for (i = 0; i < TEST_SIZE; i++)
    {
        memptr[i] = hash(i);
    }

    // Read TEST_SIZE words to memory and compare with golden values
    print("BEGIN READ\n\r");
    errors = 0;
    for (i = 0; i < TEST_SIZE; i++)
    {
        if (memptr[i] != hash(i))
            errors++;
    }

    // Print Results
    if (errors != 0)
        print("ERROR FOUND\n\r");
    else
        print("ALL GOOD!\n\r");

    return 0;
}
```

This program writes 64kB of values to the beginning of external memory and reads them back, note this is eight times more memory than was allocated to the MicroBlaze BRAM. Is this test comprehensive?

Run the example

1. Use Xilinx Tools > Program FPGA to program the hardware design onto the FPGA
2. Create a **Run Configuration** with your test program as in previous labs

You should see:

```
BEGIN WRITE  
BEGIN READ  
ALL GOOD!
```

Appear on your Terminal or Console tab